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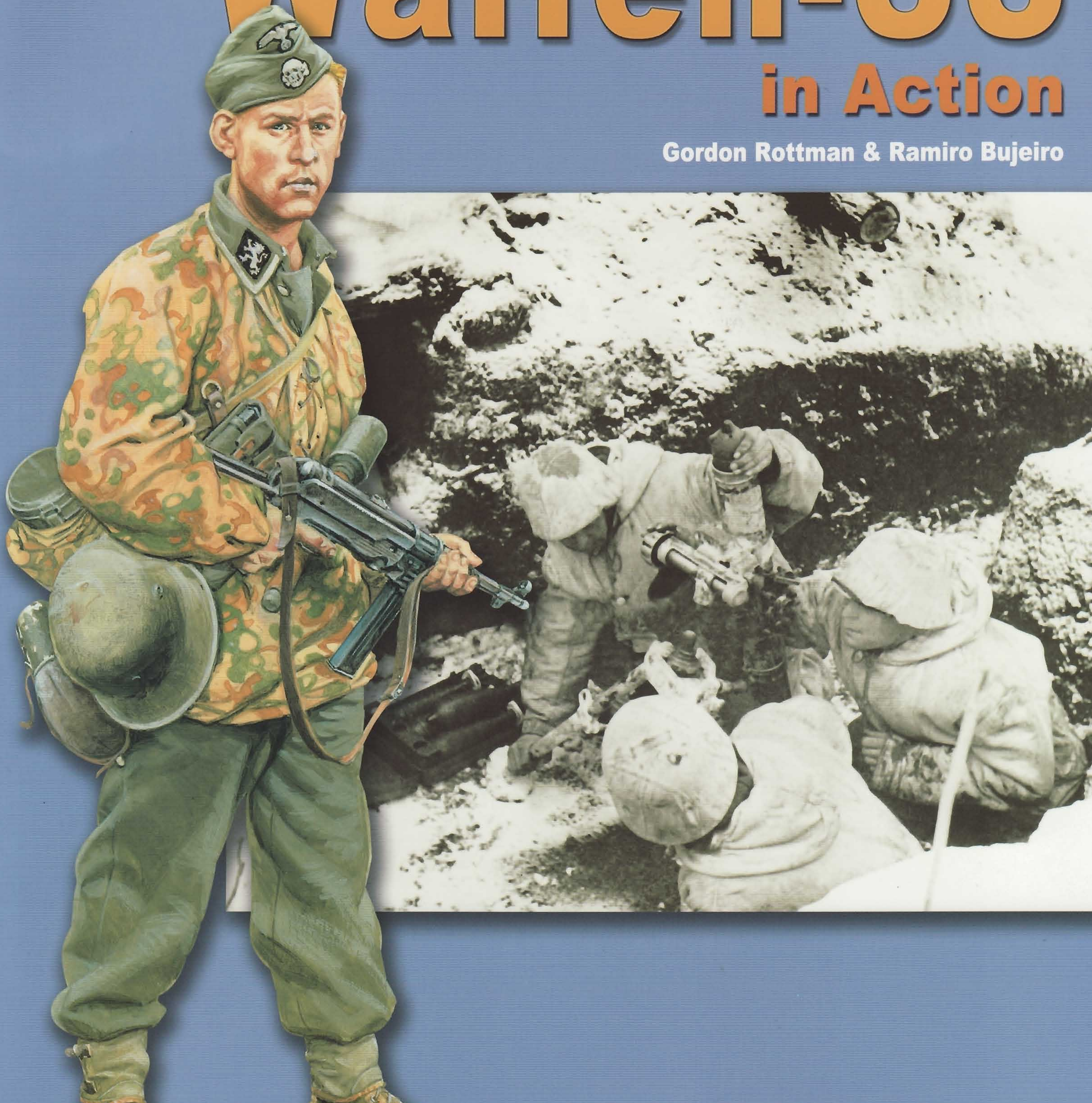
Waffen-SS
in Action

Gordon Rottman & Ramiro Bujeiro



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Text by Gordon Rottman
Color Plates by Ramiro Bujeiro

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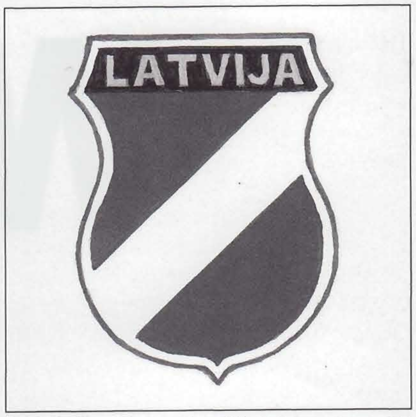
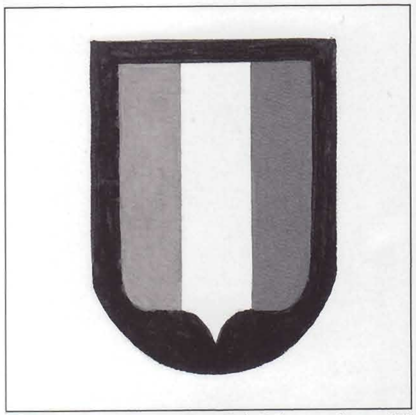
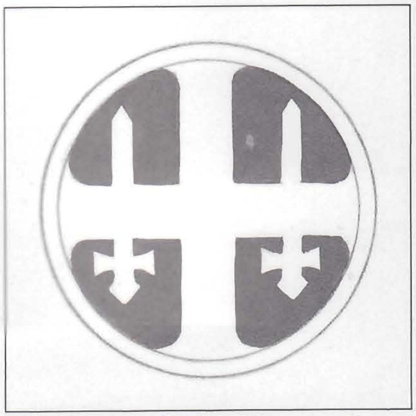


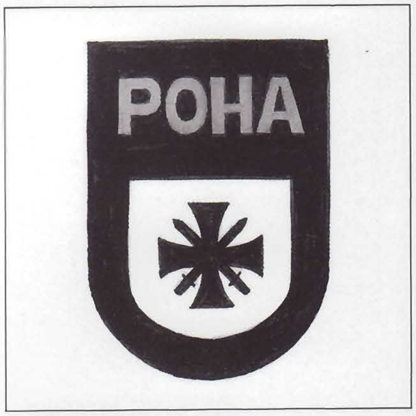
15.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (lettische Nr.1)



33.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS "Charlemagne" (französische Nr.1)



SS-Freiwilligen-Legion "Norwegen"



29.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (russische Nr.1)

Introduction

The omnificent Allgemeine-SS (General-SS) or Gesamt-SS (Total-SS) began life in 1925 as die Schutzstaffel der NSDAP, an organization dedicated to the protection of Nazi Party leadership. The Schutzstaffel—"Protection Service"—evolved through many renditions through the years all the time growing more powerful.

Eventually the SS would contain its own substantial armed force, the Waffen-SS. Many of the original members of the units that would be consolidated into the Waffen-SS three months after the start of World War II were from the old Freikorps (Free Corps) and Reichswehr (National Defense) plus various pro-Nazi paramilitary formations. The organizations to be included in the new Waffen-SS were the SS-Verfügungstruppe ([Special] Disposal Troops—internal security guards—SS-VT), Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" (Life [Guard] Regiment—Hitler's bodyguard—LSAH), elements of the SS-Totenkopfverbände (Deathhead Formation—concentration camp guards and reserve security units), certain Ordungpolizei (Order Police) units under the authority of the SS, and other minor organizations such as SS-Heimwehr Danzig (Home Defense Danzig). As of 6 December 1939 the SS possessed a "second army." It would be a long time before the Wehrmacht (Defense Force) would accept the extremely politicized army. It was not a component of the Wehrmacht as were the Heer, Kriegsmarine, and Luftwaffe. Tactical control of Waffen-SS units in the field though was assigned to the Heer.

The Waffen-SS may have worn field gray uniforms, but they were difficult to mistake as Heerestruppen. On their collars SS soldiers displayed black tabs with their unique SS rank insignia on the left and the runic SS on the right, or some other insignia identifying their unit. They wore Heer style rank shoulder straps, but in black rather than the usual dark bluish-green. The death head was displayed on the front of their headgear along with a small national eagle of a different design than worn by the Wehrmacht. A larger version of the eagle was worn on the left upper sleeve rather than over the right chest pocket. Many units wore cuff bands on their left sleeve identifying their honorific title. They also had their own belt buckle inscribed Meine Ehre heißt Treue! (My Honor is my Loyalty!) rather than Gott mit uns (God is with us).

The standard field uniforms were similar to those of the Heer, but the Waffen-SS was a pioneer in the development of camouflage uniforms and the SS was issuing camouflage smocks, helmet covers, and face masks before the war. The Waffen-SS also issued its own line of winter clothing. With the rapid expansion of the Waffen-SS from 1943 the demand for clothing, equipment, and weapons could not keep pace. It was not uncommon for training units and other second line units to be issued foreign uniforms and equipment. Much of the weaponry was obsolescent and they were forced to use non-standard ammunition. This does not mean that all such weapons were inferior. Many Czechoslovak weapons were quite good for example. There were certain early divisions that received the most modern equipment and quality manpower. These were the "fire brigade" formations, but because they spearheaded attacks and launched counterattacks they suffered greatly. Most other divisions and smaller combat units received lesser equipment being employed for anti-partisan and rear area security missions. Some of these later divisions, many of which only reached brigade strength, were of poor quality in manpower, training, and reliability.

For the higher quality Waffen-SS divisions the superiority of training bestowed on officers and enlisted men alike was a key to their success. For the rank and file it focused on political indoctrination, physical fitness, weapons proficiency, tactical training, and field craft. Soldier-like qualities were encouraged and demanded in all aspects of the soldier's life. After two months of basic training soldiers were sent to specialty training. This may have been provided in a school or in a unit. Training standards were reduced and courses shortened as the war wore on and the quality of training and the general state of the troops deteriorated overall.

Officers were expected to meet extremely high standards in the early days. Those attending the SS-Junkerschule at Bad Tölz were of especially high quality (this was not the only Waffen-SS officer's school). Besides leadership, tactics, and battle command skills there was a strong emphasis on developing a bond between officers and troops. Rather than iron hard discipline a mutual respect and trust between ranks was encouraged. The goal was a more relaxed form of leadership and accomplishment of a common goal. This created stronger unit cohesion. In the Heer there was a definite class distinction between the ranks, although this had been somewhat reduced since the old Reichswehr days. SS troops were not required to salute officers except in formations and formal ceremonies. Officers were not addressed as Herr (Sir), but by their rank just as enlisted men were.

Waffen-SS Divisions

Prior to the outbreak of the war various SS units were reorganized into combat units to play a role in the coming domination of Europe: Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler", SS-Verfügungstruppe, and SS-Totenkopfverbände. The overemphasis on political indoctrination, insufficient numbers of experienced senior NCOs (who preferred to remain in the Heer), and lack of general experience in maneuvering troop units of battalion and larger size resulted in their dismal performance in Poland and France. Their fanaticism led to exceedingly high casualties whether attacking or defending, an issue the Heer command criticized. Too, they were responsible for atrocities even at this early date.

These formations were gradually reorganized into divisions and measures taken to improve their tactical training. The SS-Verfügungstruppen units were reorganized into the SS-Verfügungs-Division (motorisiert). After a series on name changes as SS-Division "Deutschland," "Reich," and "Das Reich," it became 2.SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich." The SS-Totenkopfverbände units formed the basis for the SS-Totenkopf-Division, which eventually became 3.SS-Panzer-Division "Totenkopf." Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" did not become a division, SS-Division LSSAH, until June 1941.

Additional divisions were raised after the Waffen-SS was created and the force began to "diversify." The Polizei-Division was organized from Ordungspolizei (Order Police) and Heerestruppen in late 1939. While under Waffen-SS control it was not rated as a full SS division until early 1942 as the SS-Polizei-Division. It would become 4.SS-Polizei-Panzergrenadier-Division. Next in line was the SS-Division (motorisiert) "Germania" organized at the end of 1941. It was an assemblage of SS-Standarte "Nordland" manned by Danes and Norwegians, SS-Standarte "Westland" of Dutch and Flemish, and SS-Standarte "Germania" transferred from the SS-Verfügungs-Division. Confusion resulted in the division and an organic regiment having the same title so the division was renamed "Wiking" a month later, which also was more appealing to its Scandinavian volunteers. It would evolve into the 5.SS-Panzer-Division "Wiking." SS-Division "Nord" was raised in mid-1941 from SS-Kampfgruppe "Nord," a collection of Totenkopf Standarten (regiments). It became a mountain division in mid-1942 and would finish the war as 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord."

The Waffen-SS used its own terms for different echelon units, which were much different from the traditional titles used by the Heer. These designations also caused problems within the Heer under whose control Waffen-SS units fought. The Waffen-SS adopted Army unit designation terms in January 1940 although regiments continued to be called Standarten until September 1940.

These early divisions were largely manned by Germans of Greater Germany, with the notable exception of Division "Wiking." In early 1942 a new source of manpower was tapped by the Waffen-SS. There were millions of Germans, a third of the world's ethnic Germans, residing outside of the Reich. In German occupied countries this manpower pool was exempt from Wehrmacht conscription. They could volunteer for the Waffen-SS though and thousands did. Their quality varied greatly depending on political and personal motivations, education, leadership, etc. Divisions comprised of ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) were identified by "Volunteer" (Freiwilligen) in their designations. The first of these was the SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division, later designated 7.SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen." This division was manned mostly by Volksdeutschen from Yugoslavia. As with many of the later Waffen-SS divisions, the "Prinz Eugen" was tasked for anti-partisan operations.

By the spring of 1943 11 Waffen-SS divisions had been raised, though some had not yet seen combat:

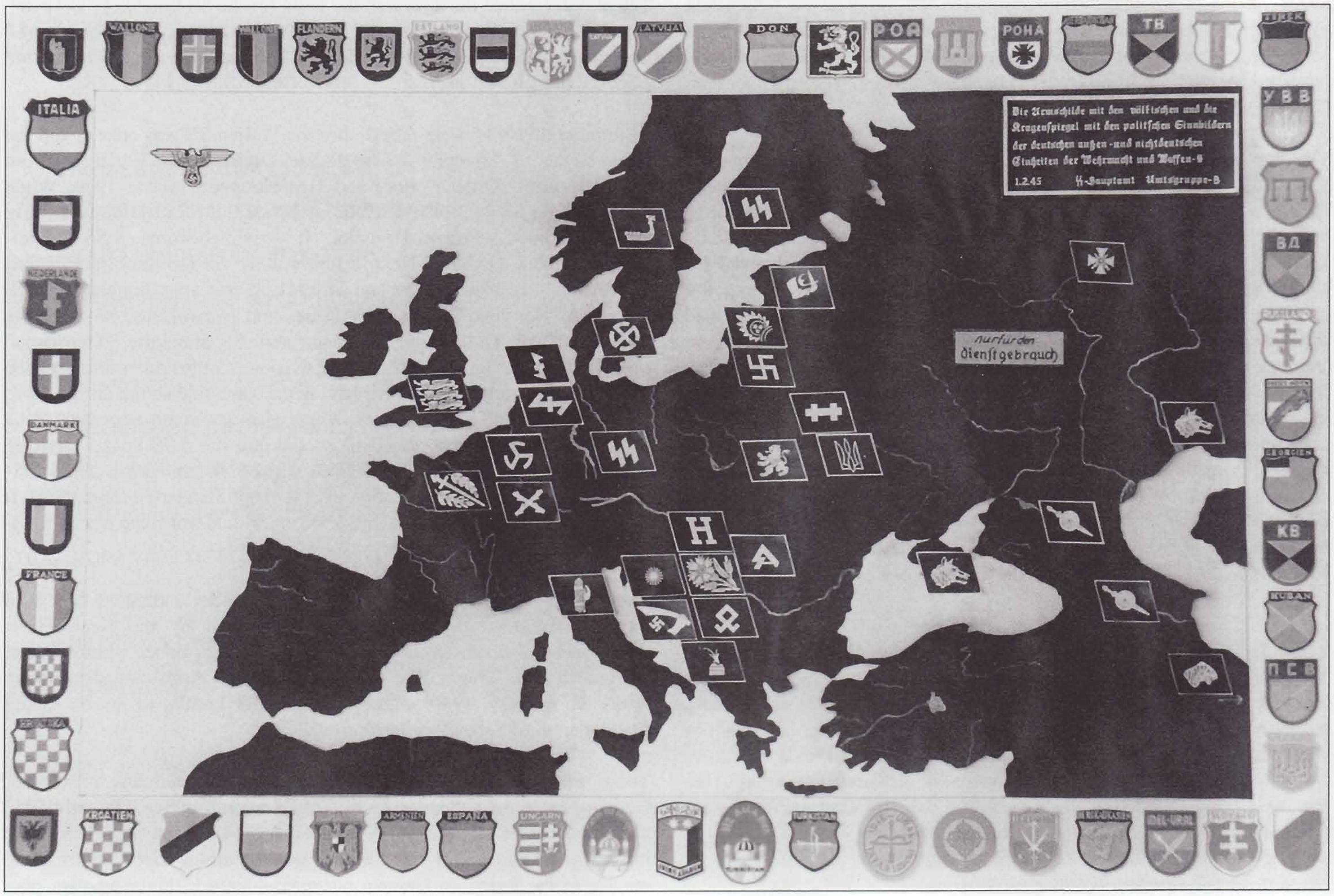
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler"
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Das Reich"
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Totenkopf"
SS-Polizei-Division
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Wiking"
SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord"
SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen"
SS-Kavallerie-Division
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Hohenstaufen"
SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Karl de Grosse"
SS-Freiwilligen-Panzergrenadier-Division "Nordland"

The divisions went through numerous designation and honorific name changes. In October 1943 they were assigned numbers in the order activated, with the exception of the LSSAH. It was actually the third Waffen-SS division to be organized, but was assigned the number "1." At the same time all Waffen-SS regiments were assigned sequential numbers. Over time some divisions even changed their ethnic makeup and other reorganizations were common. It was common for Panzergrenadier divisions to be upgraded to Panzer for example. In June 1944 several of the SS-Freiwilligen (volunteer) divisions were redesignated Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS. Later divisions also bore this title to identify them as containing "acceptable" non-Germans. The manpower situation had become critical.

Many of these later divisions were of very poor quality, poorly armed, and often never attained division strength. In all 38 Waffen-SS divisions were raised. At the end of 1943 there were almost 247,000 men in the Waffen-SS. In May 1945 at the war's end there were approximately 800,000 men in the Waffen-SS.

Larger Waffen-SS commands were also formed, corps and armies, although they were partly staffed by Heeres officers to provide the necessary tactical expertise. From late 1943 when Germany was forced to take the defensive and frontlines crumbed, the better quality Waffen-SS divisions were employed as "fire brigades" to now plug holes in the increasingly stretched frontlines, counterattack to regain lost key terrain, and maneuver to block enemy penetrations. They suffered greatly and these divisions were shattered time after time being rebuilt each time as only a shadow of their former selves. Hitler deluded himself by continuing to create more Waffen-SS "divisions" in hopes of turning the tide, but the quality manpower, weapons, equipment, or even the supplies necessary to sustain them were not available.

In the war's final months Waffen-SS units were assigned unfeasible missions they were no longer capable of accomplishing regardless of their political reliability and motivation.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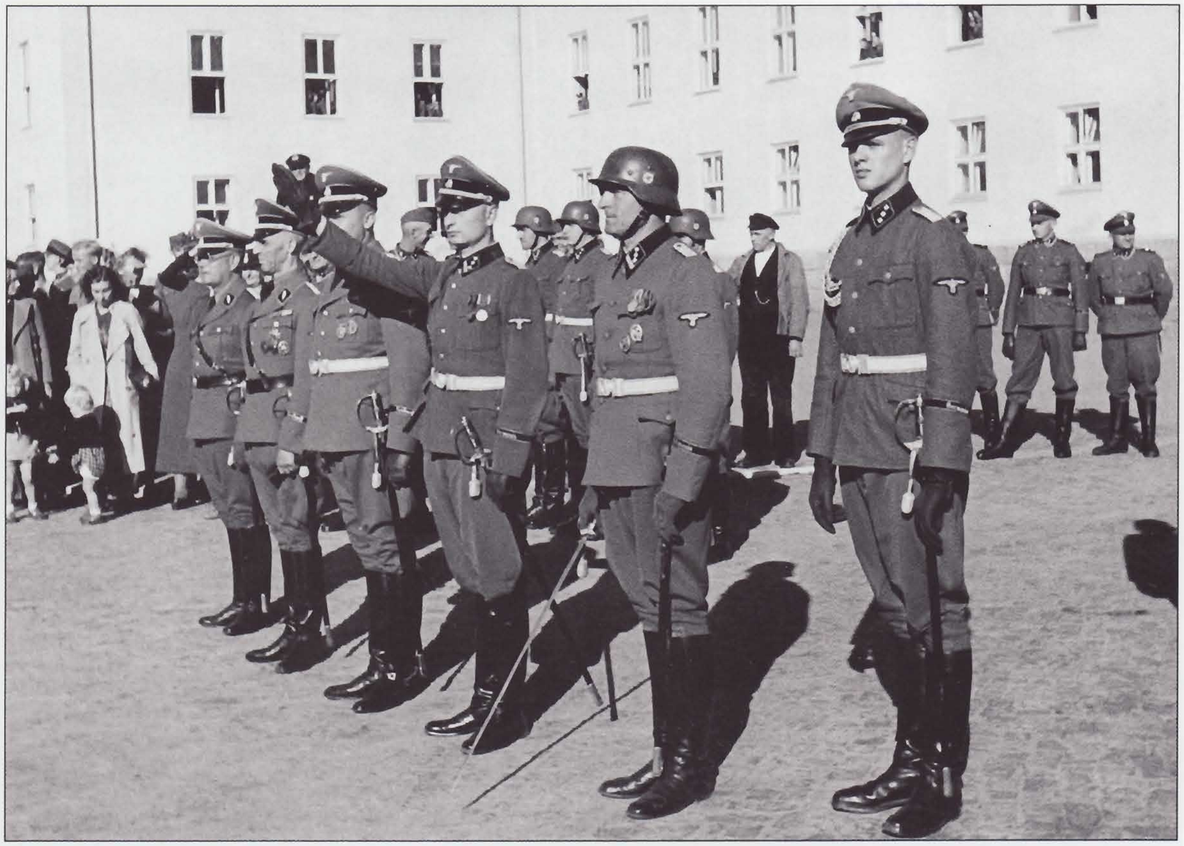
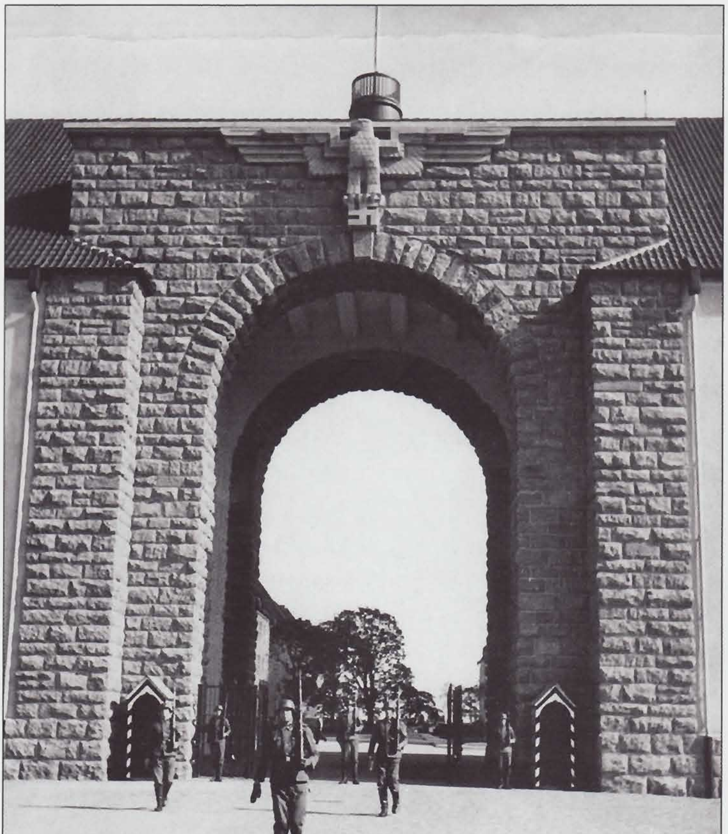
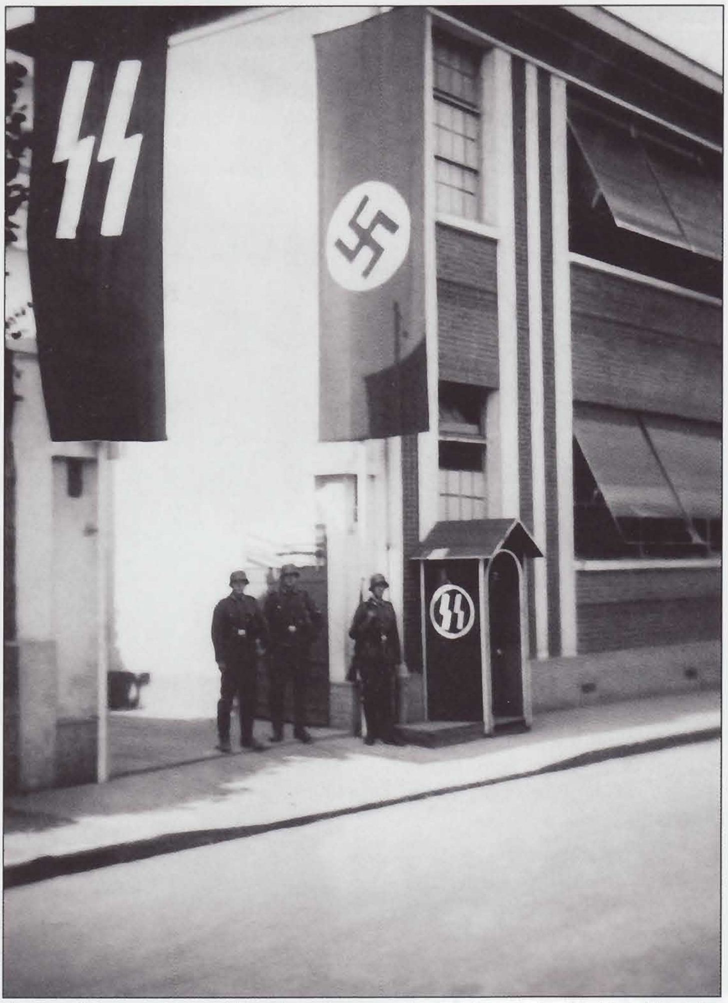
KROATIEN
УВВ
ВД
GEORGIEN
KB
KUBAN
ПСВ
KROATIEN
ARMENIEN
ESPAÑA
UNGARN
TURKESTAN
IDEL-URAL
Die Armschilde mit den völkischen und die Kragenſpiegel mit den politſchen Sinnbildern der deutschen außen- und nichtdeutschen Einheiten der Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS
1.2.45 SS-Hauptamt Amtsgruppe-B
nur für den Dienstgebrauch

Officers of the "Germania" Regiment during a public ceremony. They wear the silver-colored (actually aluminum embroidery for officers—enlisted ranks wore silver-gray embroidery) on black "Germania" cuff titles on their left sleeves.

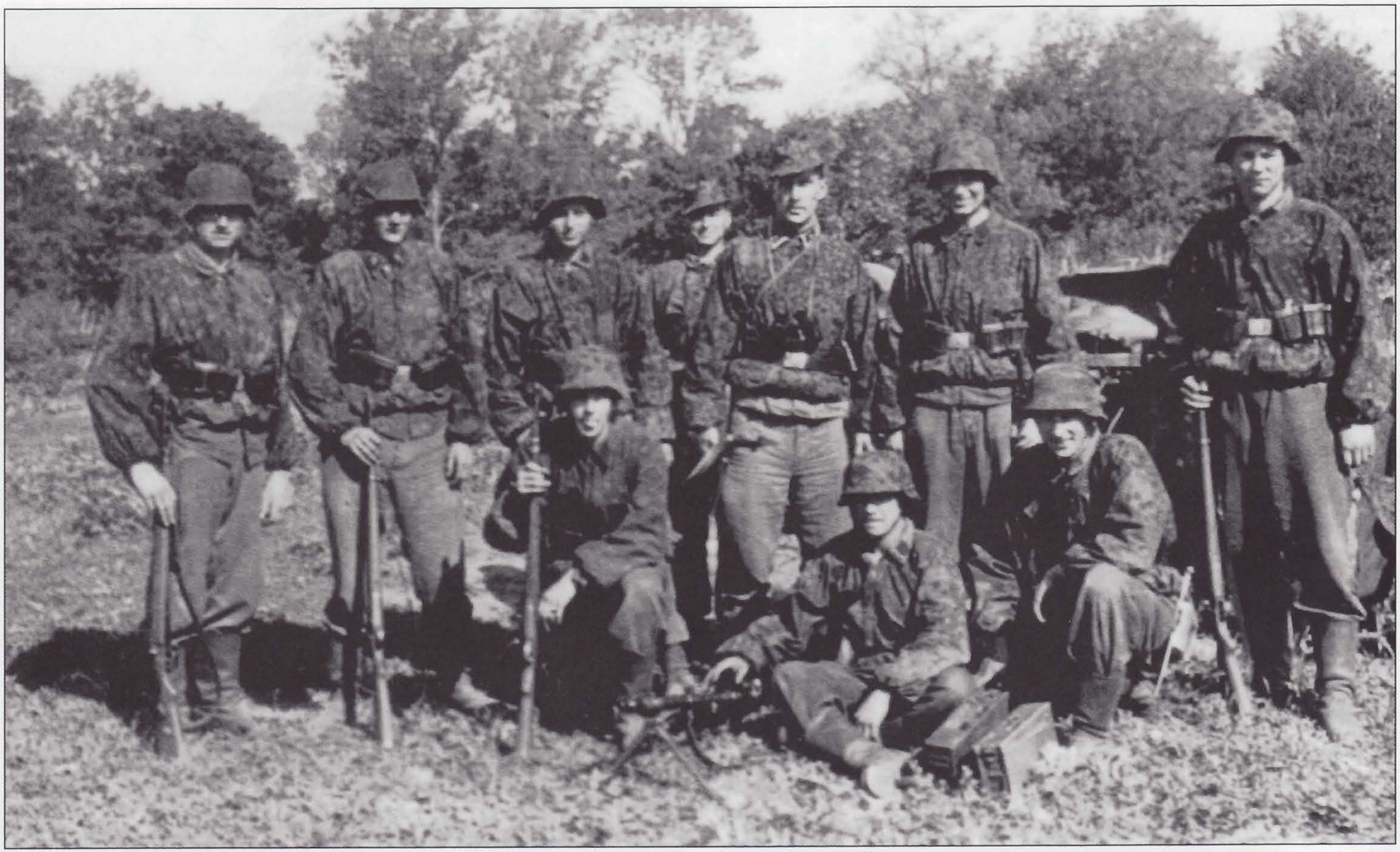




The barracks of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment "Germania" in Hamburg. Assigned to 5.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Wiking," the rest of the division was based in Klagenfurt, Carinthia in southern Austria. The guard huts are black and white stripped. (Similar Heeres huts were red, black, and white stripped.)



Waffen-SS guard huts (Wachhaus) were often painted black with white trim and white "SS" logos, on doubt hot on a summer day, if they entered it. Guards were not permitted to stand in the hut unless it was raining, sleeting, snowing, or experiencing hard blowing cold winds.

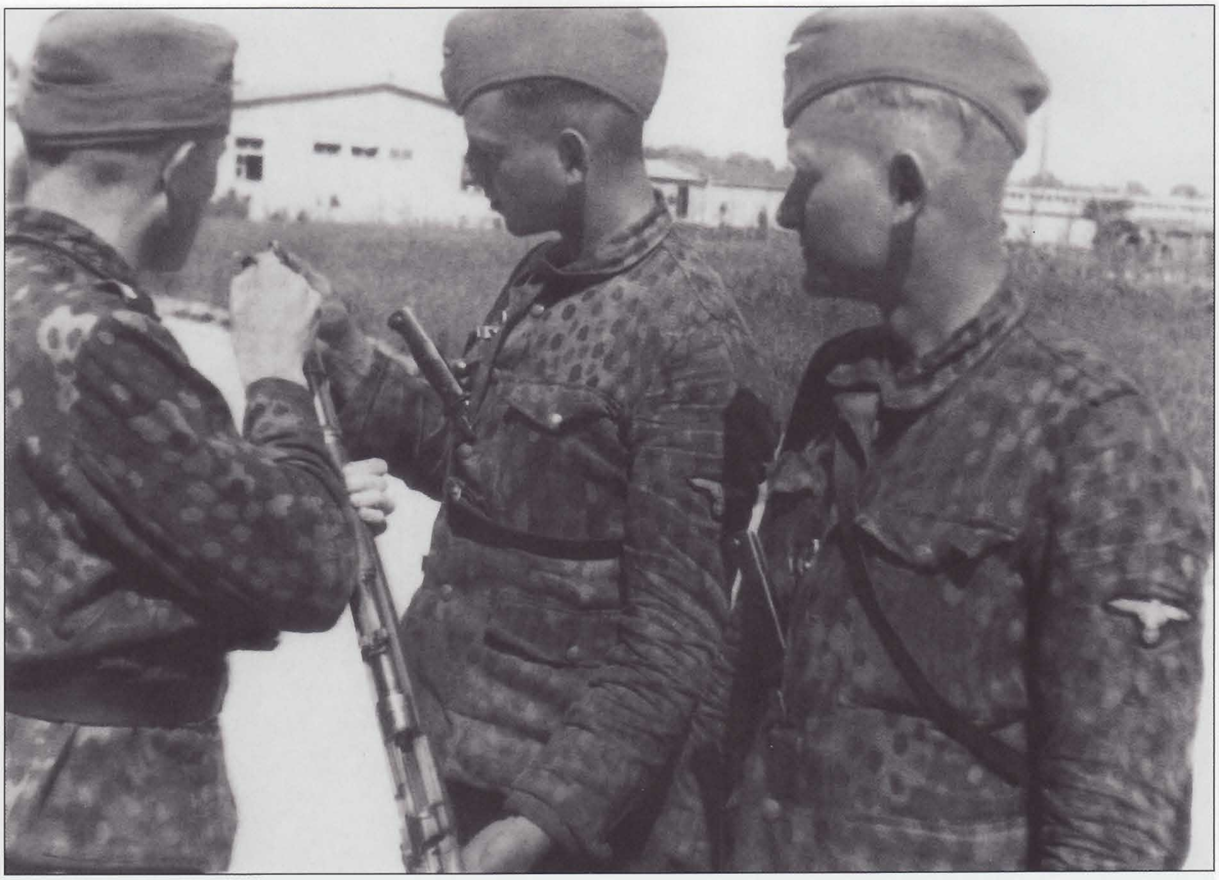


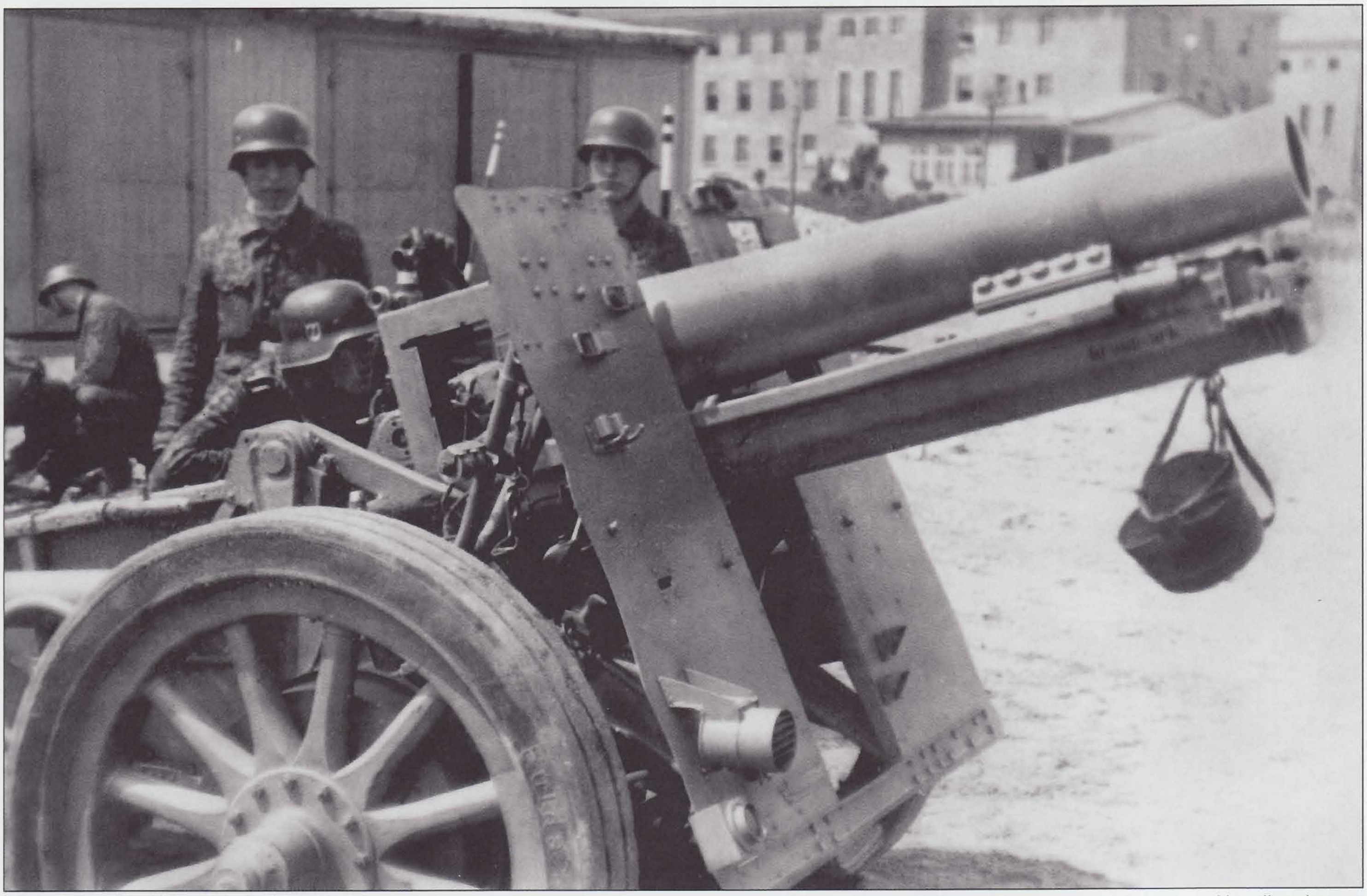
The Waffen-SS 10-man rifle squad (Schützengruppe) was identical to its Heeres counterpart. Both services used the same tactics manuals and organization tables. The squad leader (Gruppenführer), an SS-Unterscharführer, oversaw the squad's two elements and could lead or direct either. The machine gun troop (Maschinengewehr-Trupp) consisted of the gunner (Richtschütze), second machine gunner (2.Richtschütze), and the ammunition soldier (Munitionsschütze). The rifle troop (Schützentrupp) had six riflemen (Schützen), one of which was the troop leader (Truppführer), typically an SS-Sturmmann or an SS-Rottenführer. All were armed with the 7.9mm Kar98k carbine with the exception of the machine gunner and his Number 2 who had 9mm P08 or P38 pistols. In some units the Number 2 might have a carbine instead and the squad leader was to have a 9mm MP40 machine pistol, but they often carried carbines instead.

Recruits within the same field replacement battalion (SS-Feldesatz-Bataillon) receive training on both MG34 and MG42 machine guns as an SS-Untersturmführer looks on. Their future unit might have one or the other or even both.

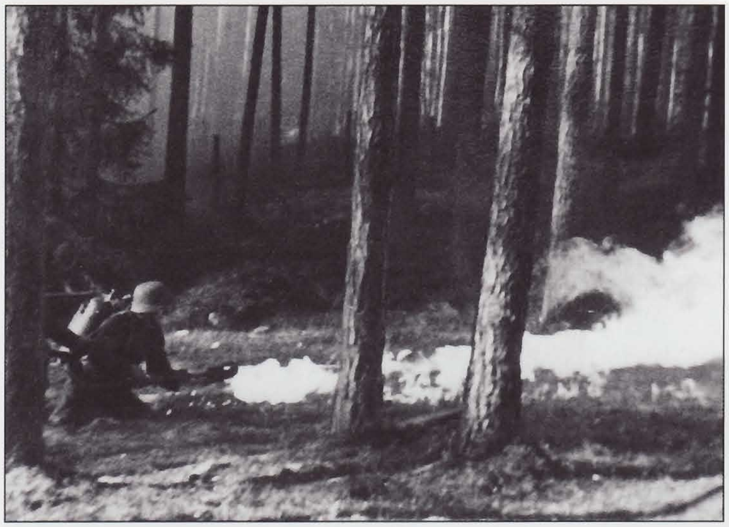
Recruits inspect the spare parts and tools storage compartment set in the trail of a 7.5cm l.IG 18 light infantry gun. It took a considerable amount of the crew's time to maintain a large crew-served weapon.

An SS-Unterscharführer meticulously inspects recruits' 7.9mm Mauser Kar98k carbines, what they called a Gewehr (rifle), Mauserbüchse (Mauser gun), Flinte (shotgun), Knarre (gun) or k acht und neunzig (k eight and ninety). The carbine's bolt, being found to be unsatisfactorily clean, is probably lying in the dirt. Their bayonets, referred to as a Seitengewehr (sidearm), are inserted in their tunic front opens awaiting inspection.

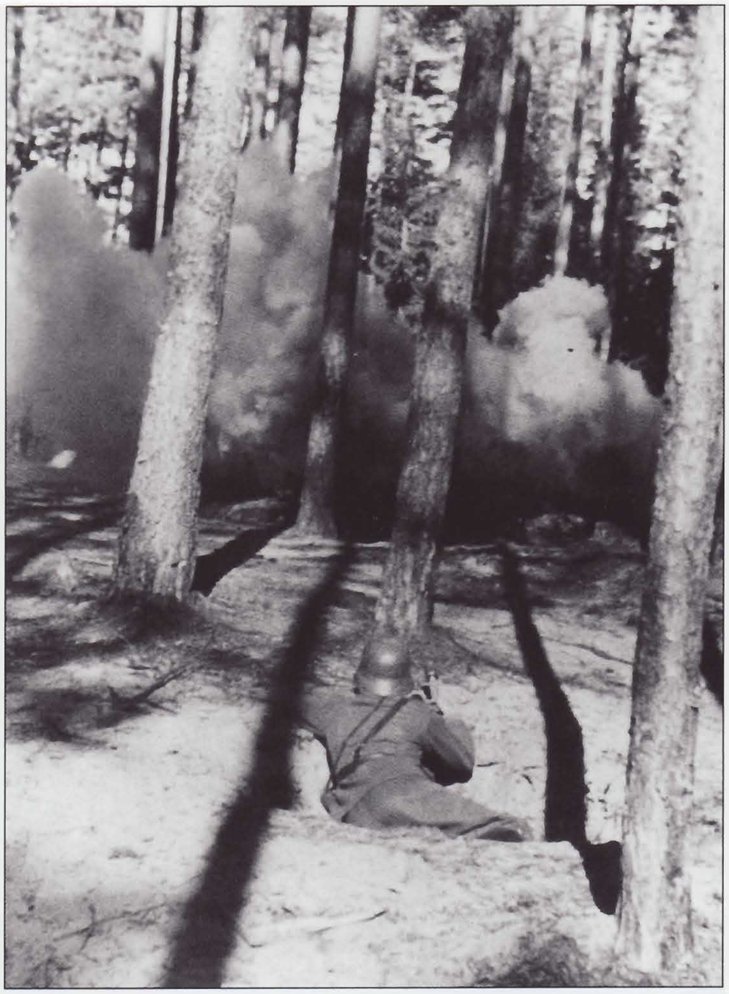




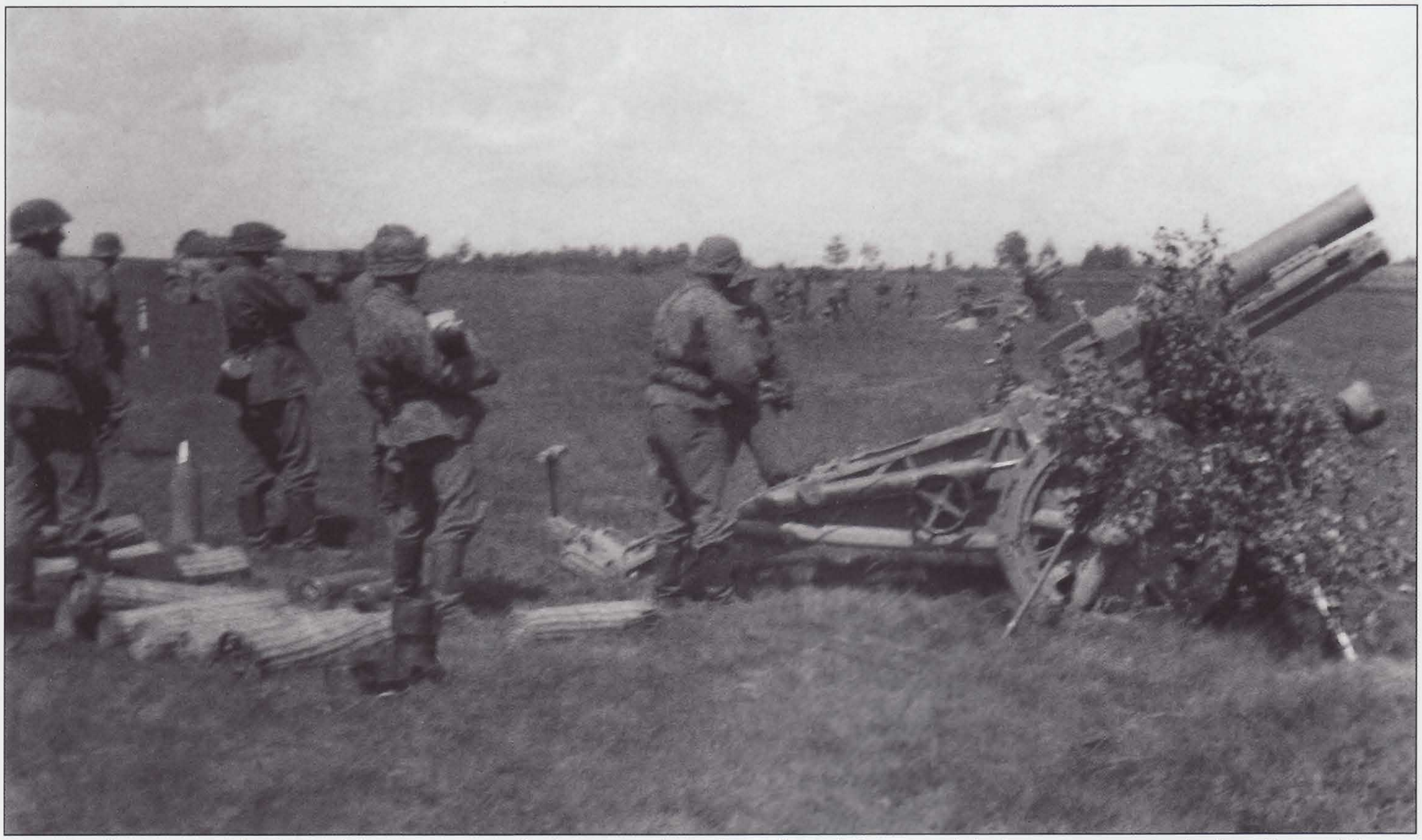
Besides four or six 7.5cm light infantry guns, the regimental infantry gun company usually possessed two 15cm s.IG33 heavy infantry guns. Not all regiments received them. While the light guns supported infantry battalions—a two-gun platoon was attached to each—the two-gun heavy platoon would additionally support the main assault battalion and was directed at enemy fortifications. They were also used to blast gaps in barbed wire obstacles. It threw a 38-kilogram (84-pound) high-explosive round almost 5,000 meters. The leather-reinforced canvas muzzle cap hangs below the barrel.



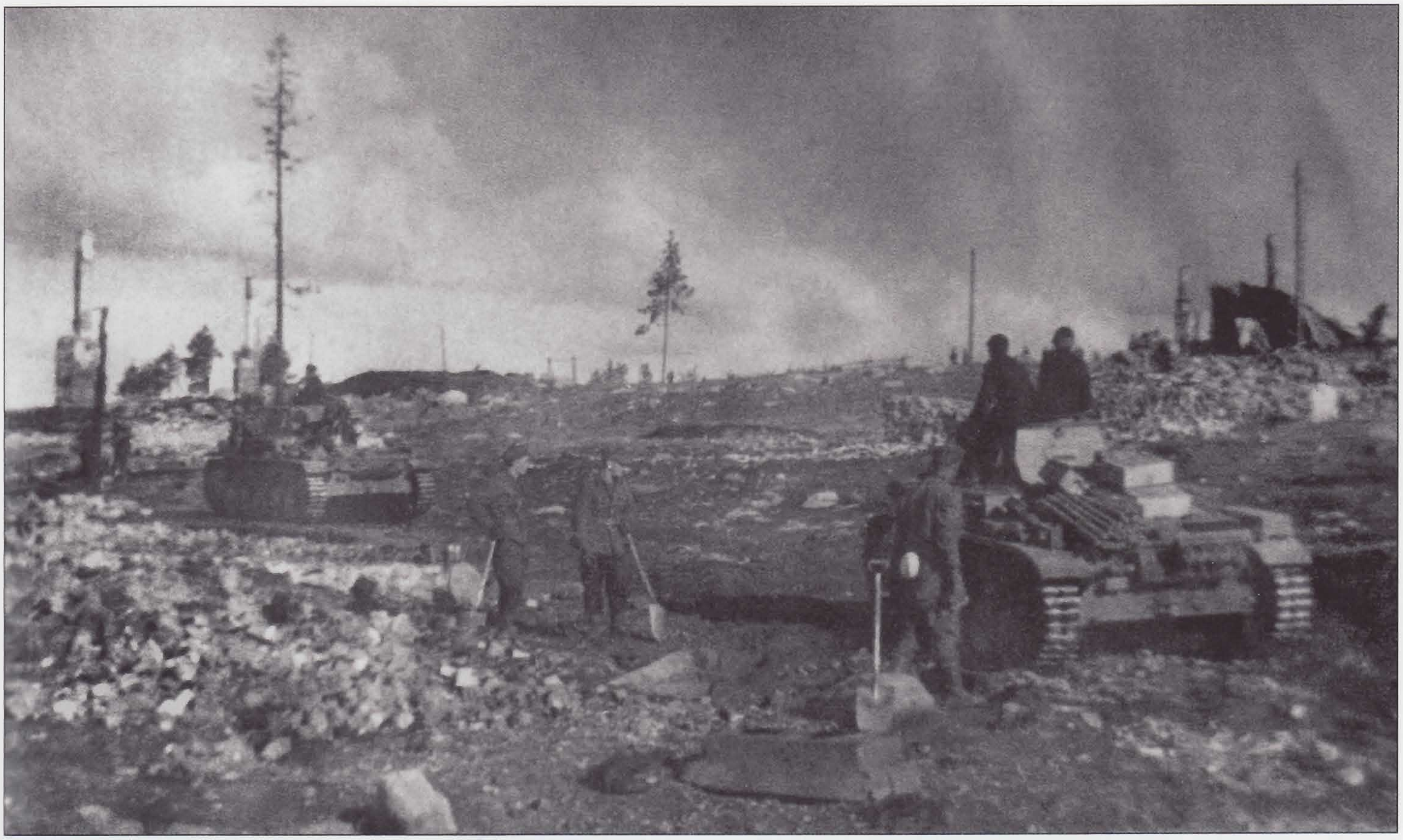
A pioneer triggers the flame gun of his flame projector 35 (Flammenwerfer 35). Aiming the flame gun near the ground allowed the flame to "roll" across the ground rather than much of it being dispersed in a billowing fireball above ground-level. Maximum effective range under favorable conditions was 25-30 meters.



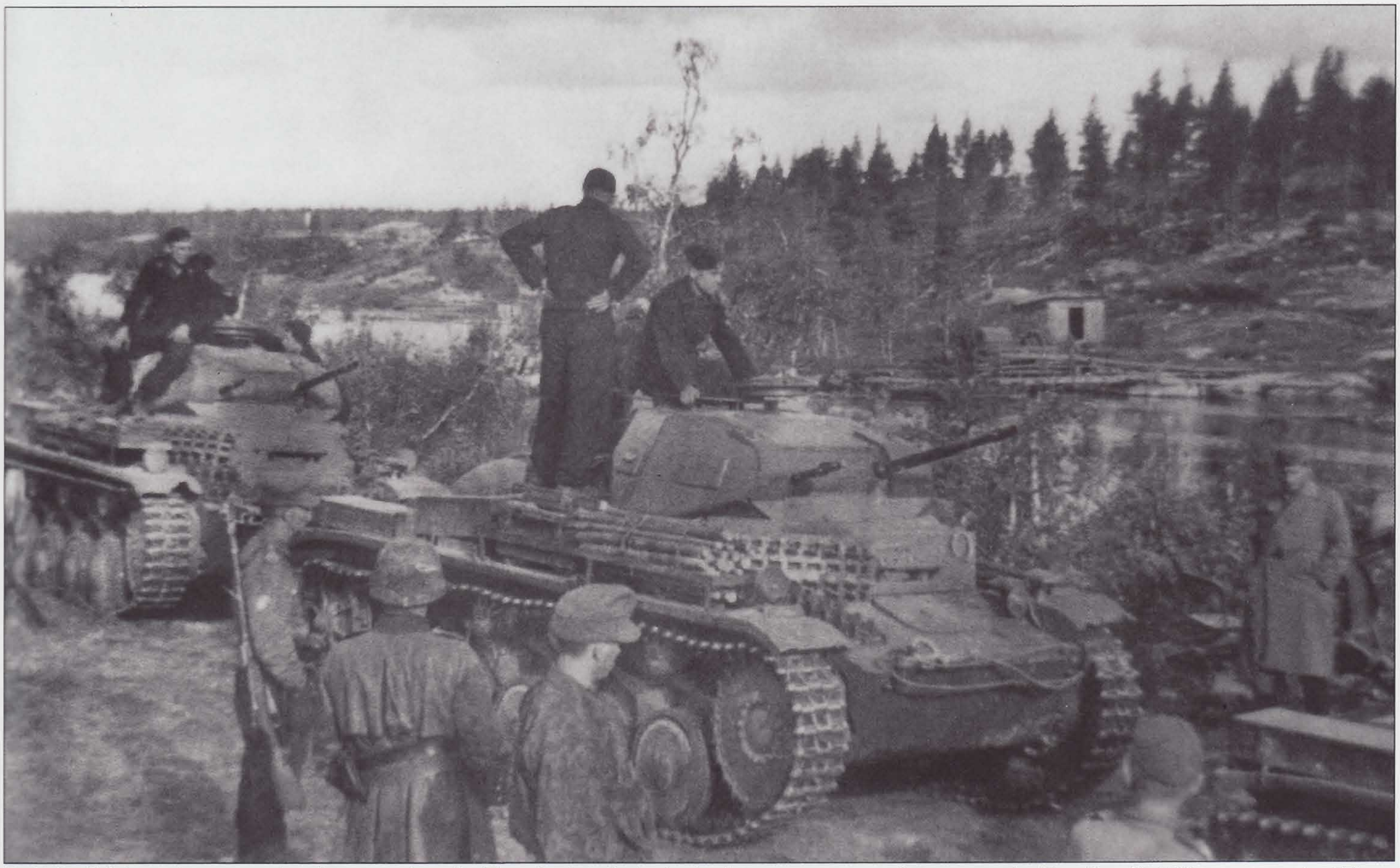
A pioneer waits for the smoke grenade screen to fully develop to blind the enemy before moving to attack a fighting position with a Stg 24 stick hand grenade. Training exercises such as this taught troops not to rush in right after throwing smoke grenades. It could take up to half a minute for the screen to develop enough to provide sufficient concealment.



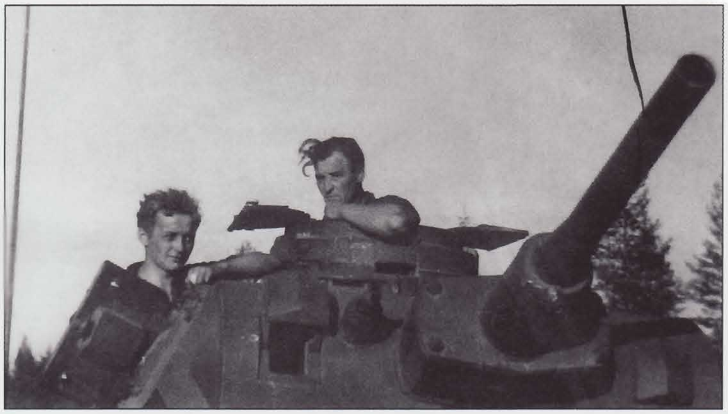
A platoon of two 15cm s.IG33 heavy infantry guns open fire in support of a regimental attack. It was a relatively compact weapon for its caliber and threw a comparatively heavy 38-kilogram (84-pound) projectile at a rate of five to seven rounds a minute. The projectiles are shipped in wicker containers which were called a Koffer (suitcase).



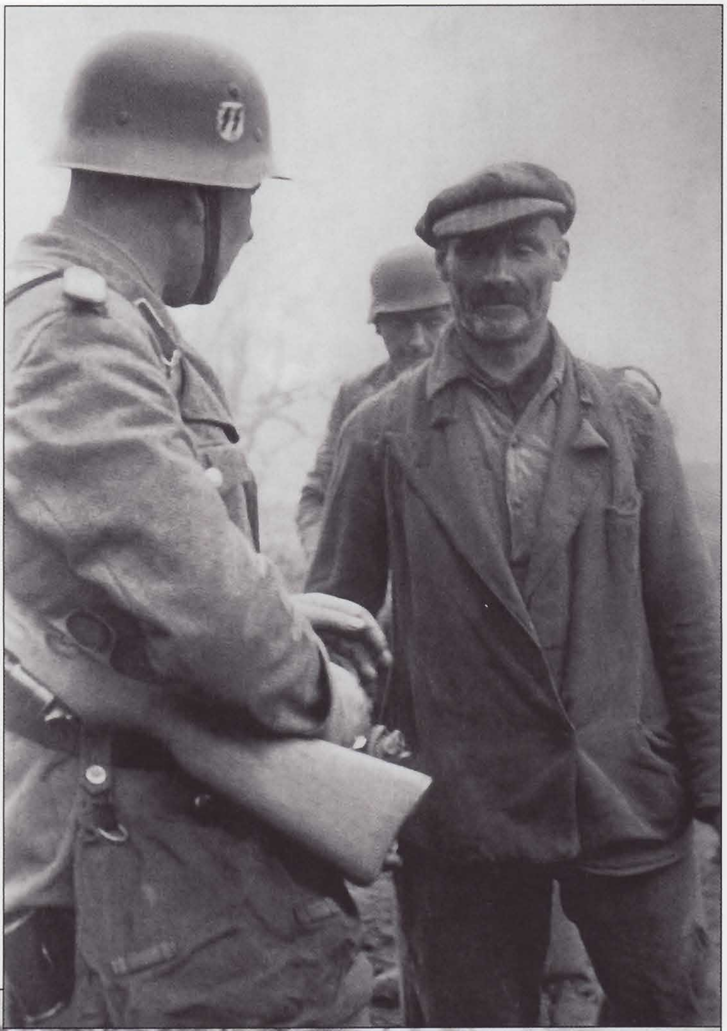
A pair of Pz.Kpfw. II light tanks passes pioneers attempting to smooth out a rocky road with only hand tools. German pioneers had very little in the way of powered construction equipment, not even a few bulldozers.



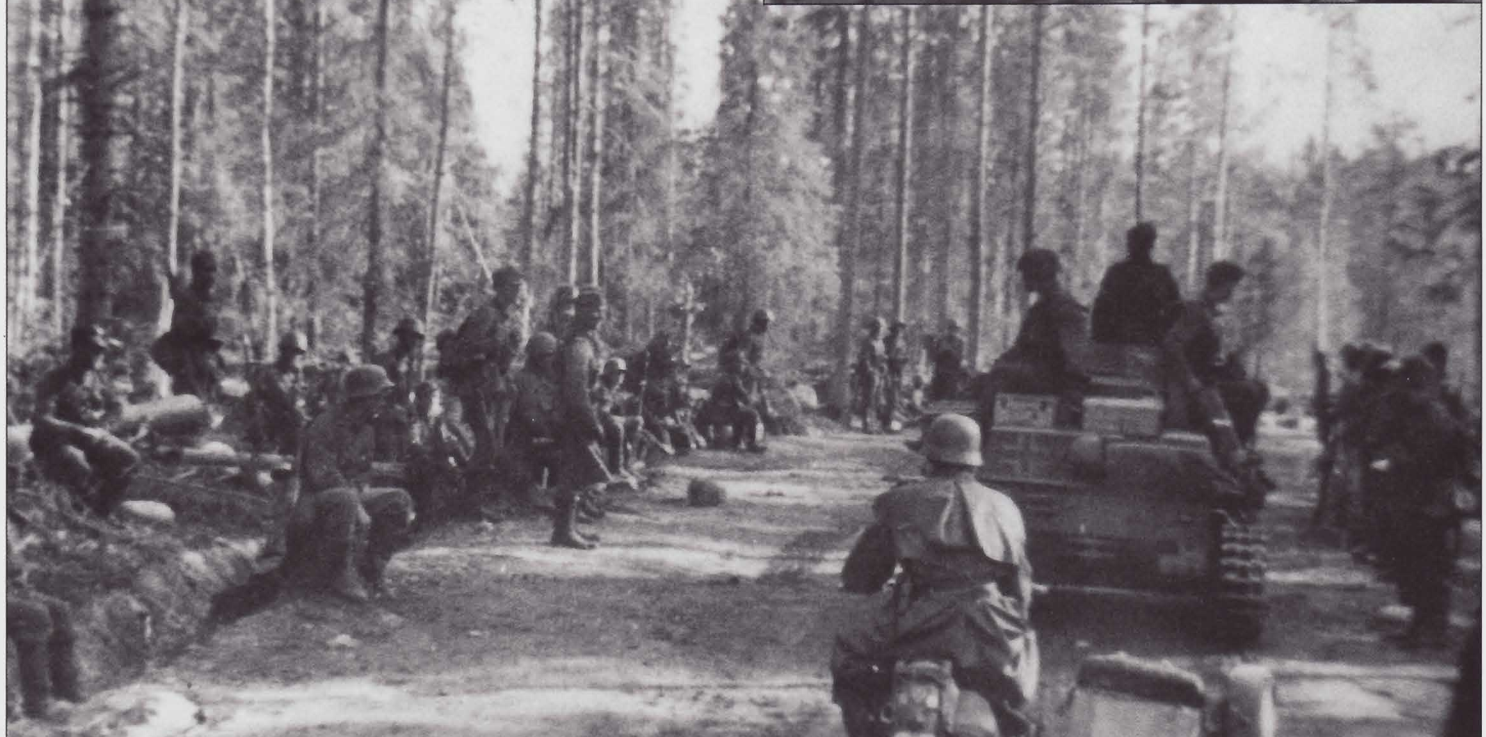
Pz.Kpfw. II light tanks approach a river crossing site. The obsolete tanks had a three-man crew and were armed with a 2cm KwK30 cannon and a 7.9mm MG13 machine gun. The man on the ground to the left is armed with a Soviet 7.62mm Mosin-Nagant M1891/30 rifle, what the Germans designated the Gew252(r). The man next to him wears the motorcycle protective suit and is armed with any number of makes and models of 7.65mm or 9mm Kurz (short) pistols used by the Germans.



The commander and loader of Pz.Kpfw. III tank take in a breath of fresh air. Between the open sight port and the 5cm KwK 38 L/42 gun is the armored MG34 coaxial machine gun. A tank's machine guns were often as valuable as the main gun.

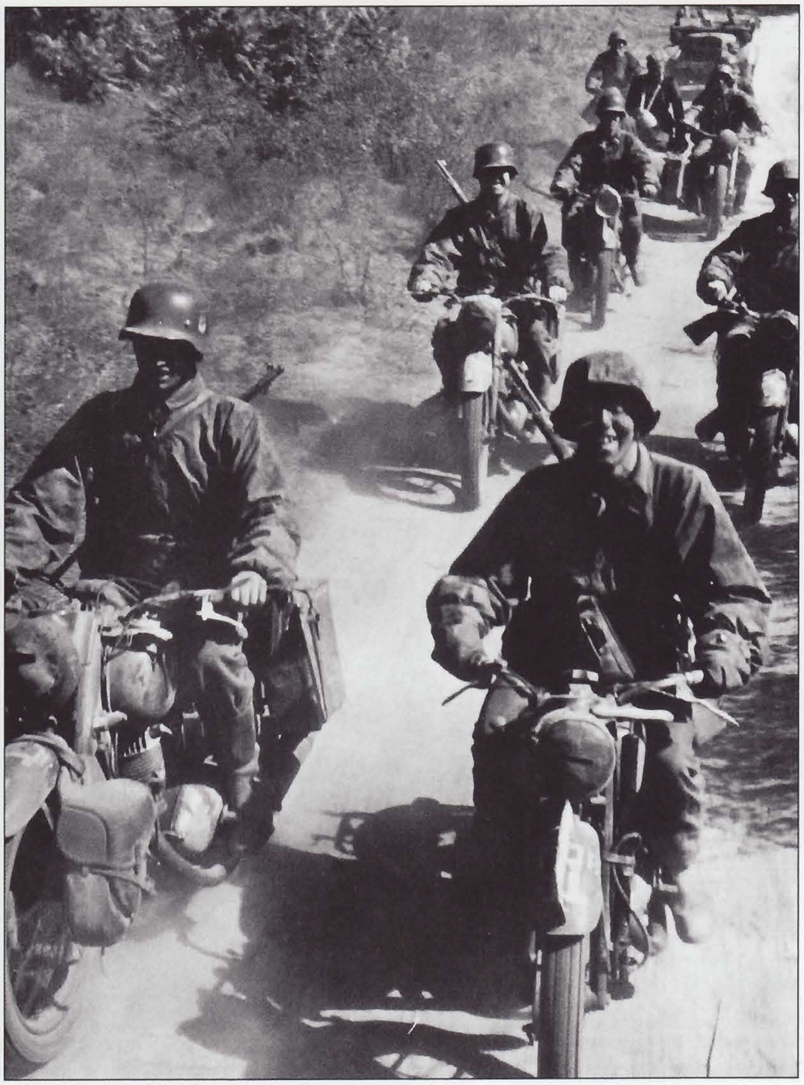


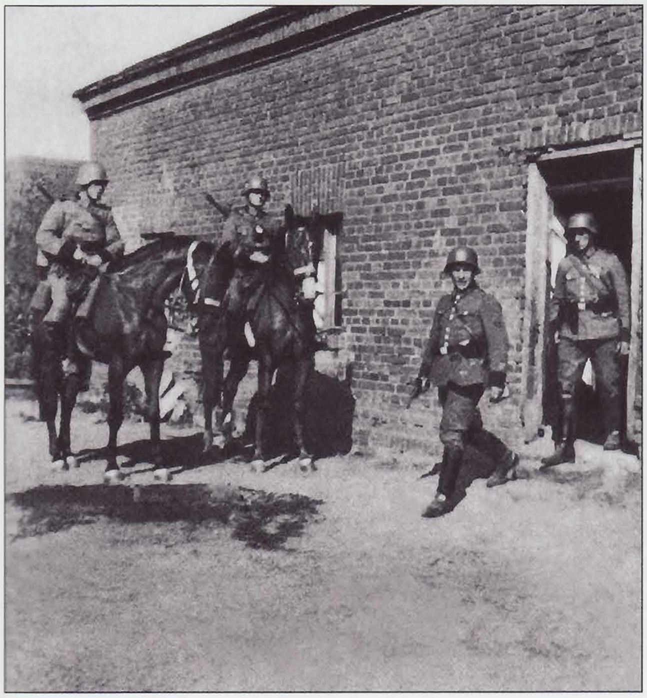
A Russian partisan suspect is brought in for interrogation. It is doubtful that he will see the sunset. The officer is armed with a 9mm MP28/II machine pistol. This was the standard machine pistol prior to the adoption of the MP38 and MP40 and saw wide use with the Waffen-SS. Many Heeres units were still armed with it when the war began.



A sidecar motorcycle (Beiwagenkrad) follows a Pz.Kpfw. II light tank over a forest road. In the northern wilderness this improved two-lane dirt road was considered "first-class."

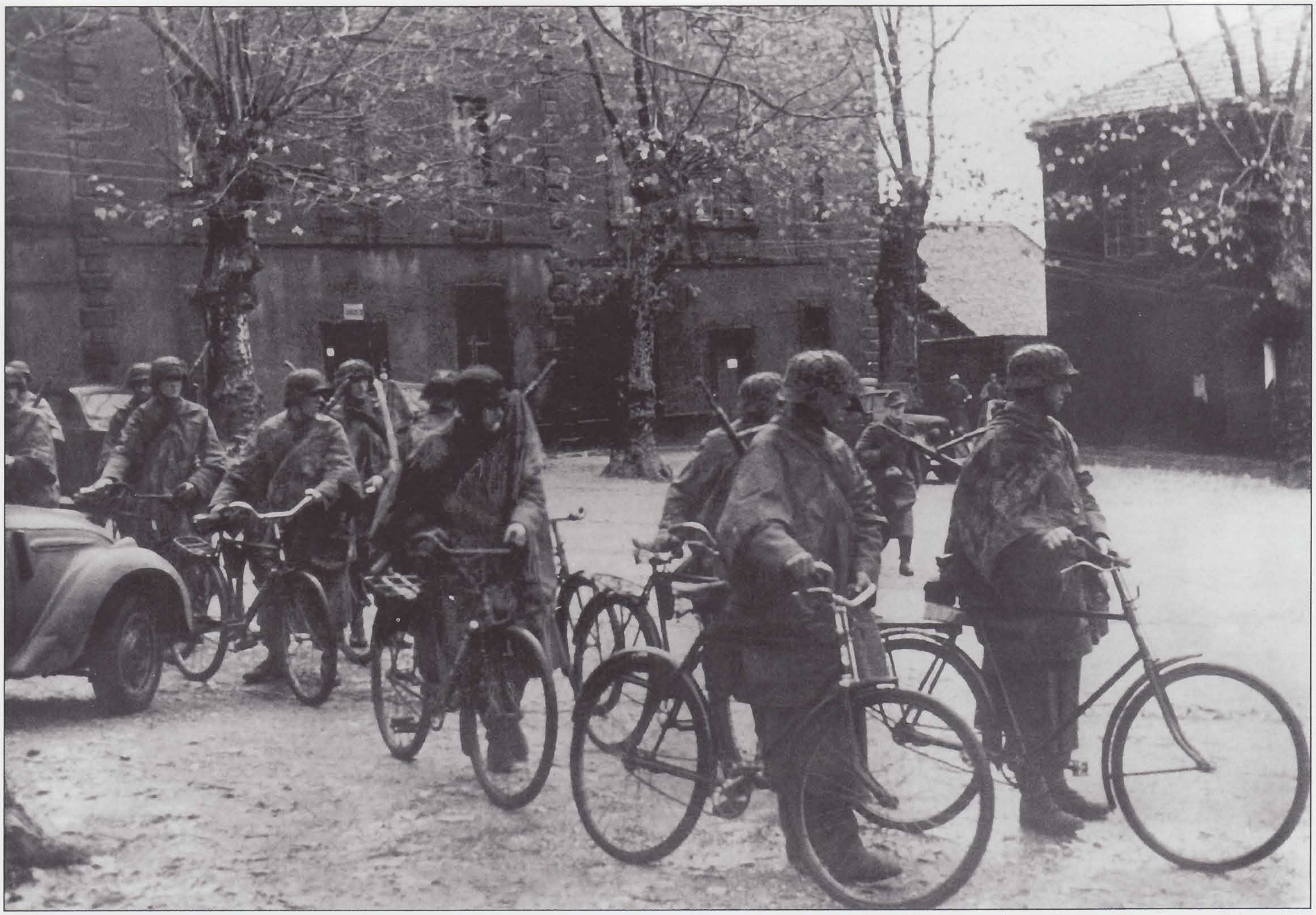
A column of solo and sidecar motorcycles of a reconnaissance unit. Besides the issue motorcycle "saddlebags" on each side of the rear wheel, the lead Kradrad to the left has a cavalry saddlebag (Packtasche 34) over the front wheel.



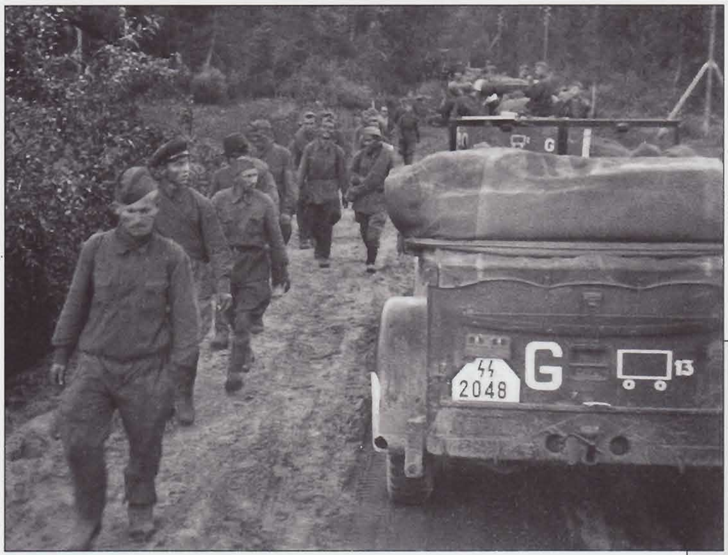


Police troops are seen emerging from a warehouse after searching it for contraband and anything of use to the Reich. Dark brown "French cuffs" adorned their green uniforms. Police uniforms also had a large number of tunic front closure buttons.

To the soldiers the war often seemed to be an unending march eastward.

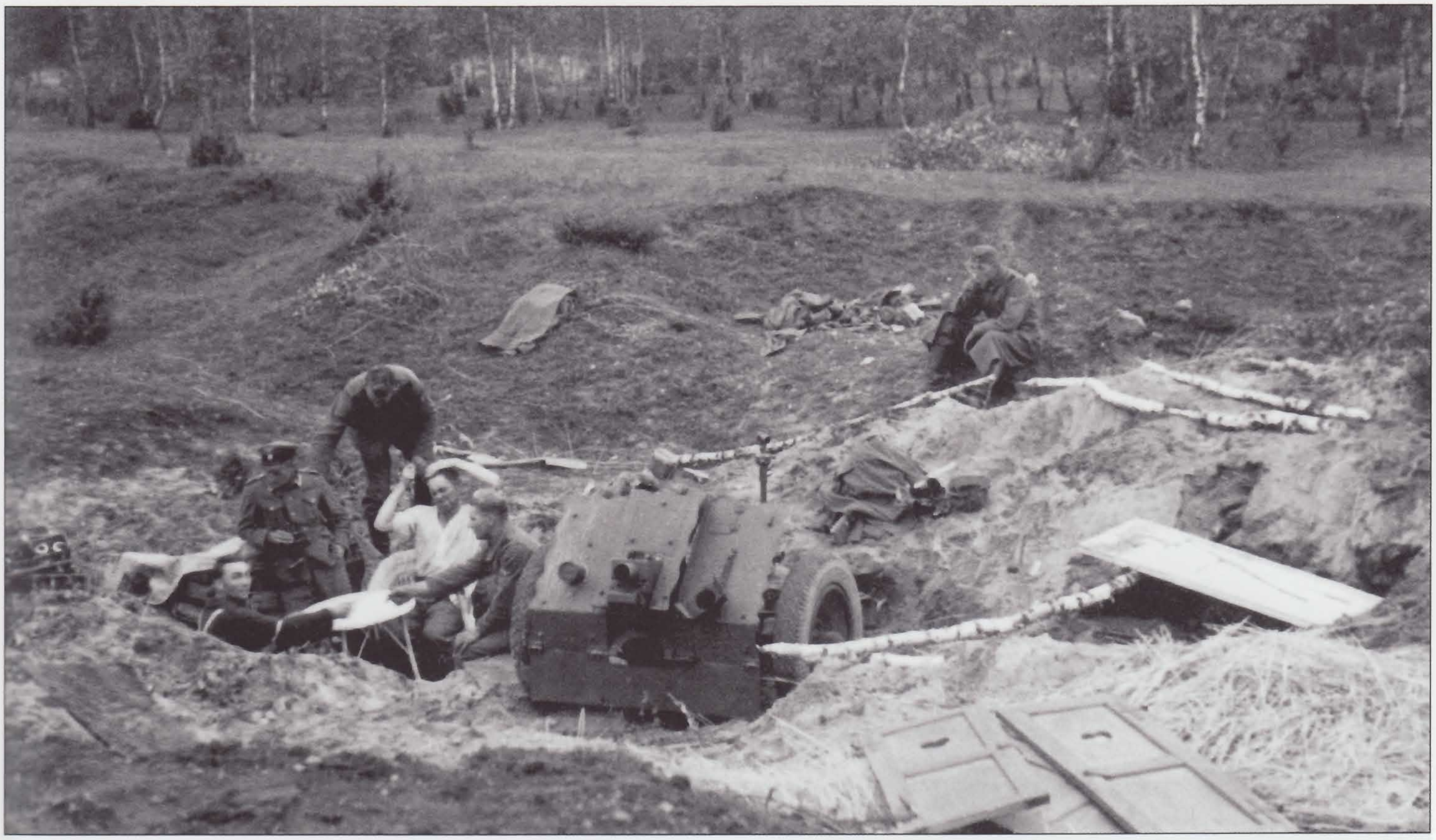


There were three manners of wearing the Zeltbahn as a rain cape: marching infantryman, horseback, and bicycle—pictured here. The Truppenfahrrad 34 bicycles were usually field gray, but they were also painted black. Civilian brand name bicycles were commandeered in large numbers.

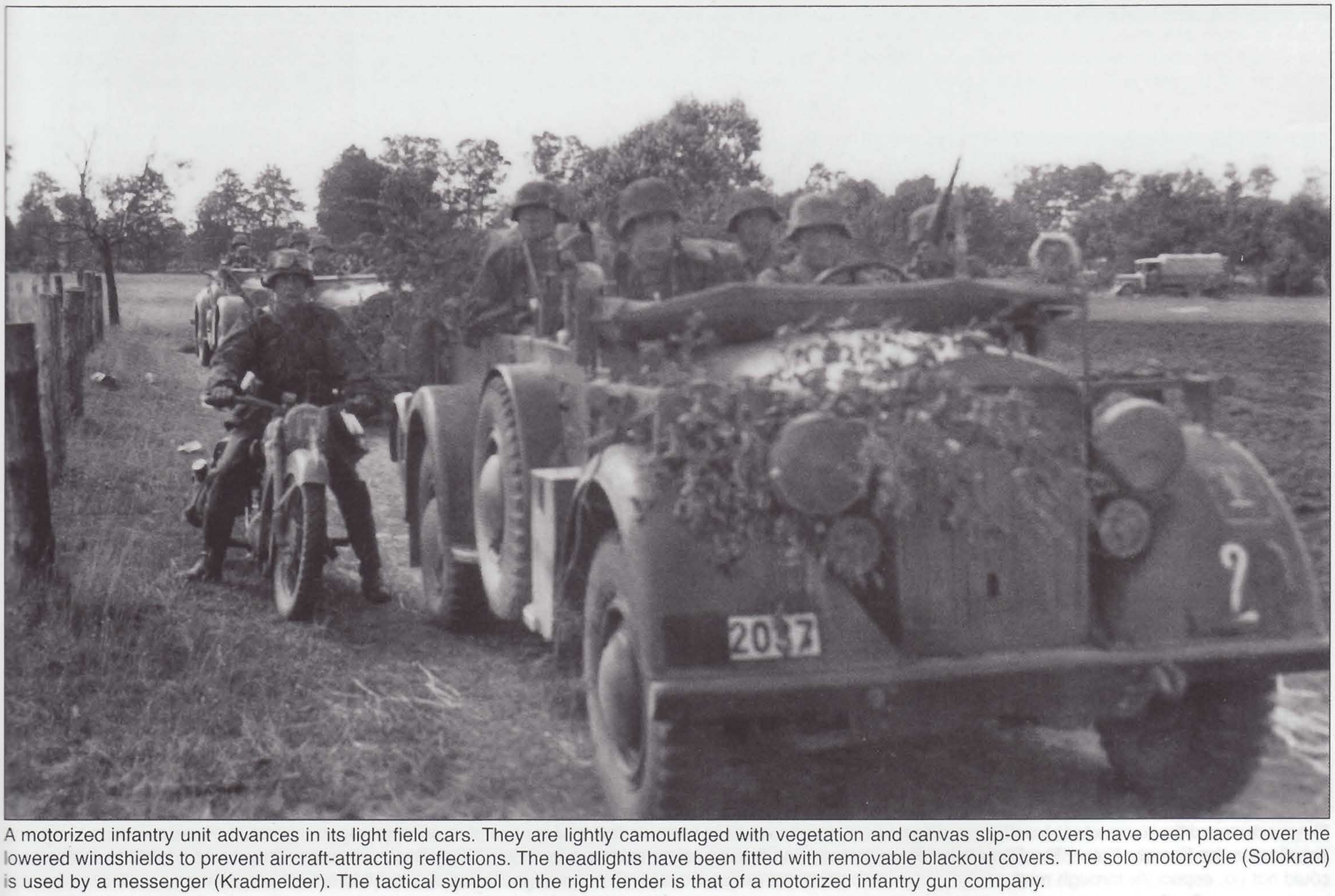


Disoriented Soviet prisoners are sent to the rear for collection. Few would survive captivity unless they volunteered for German service, which many did. The white tactical symbol is for a motorized infantry company.

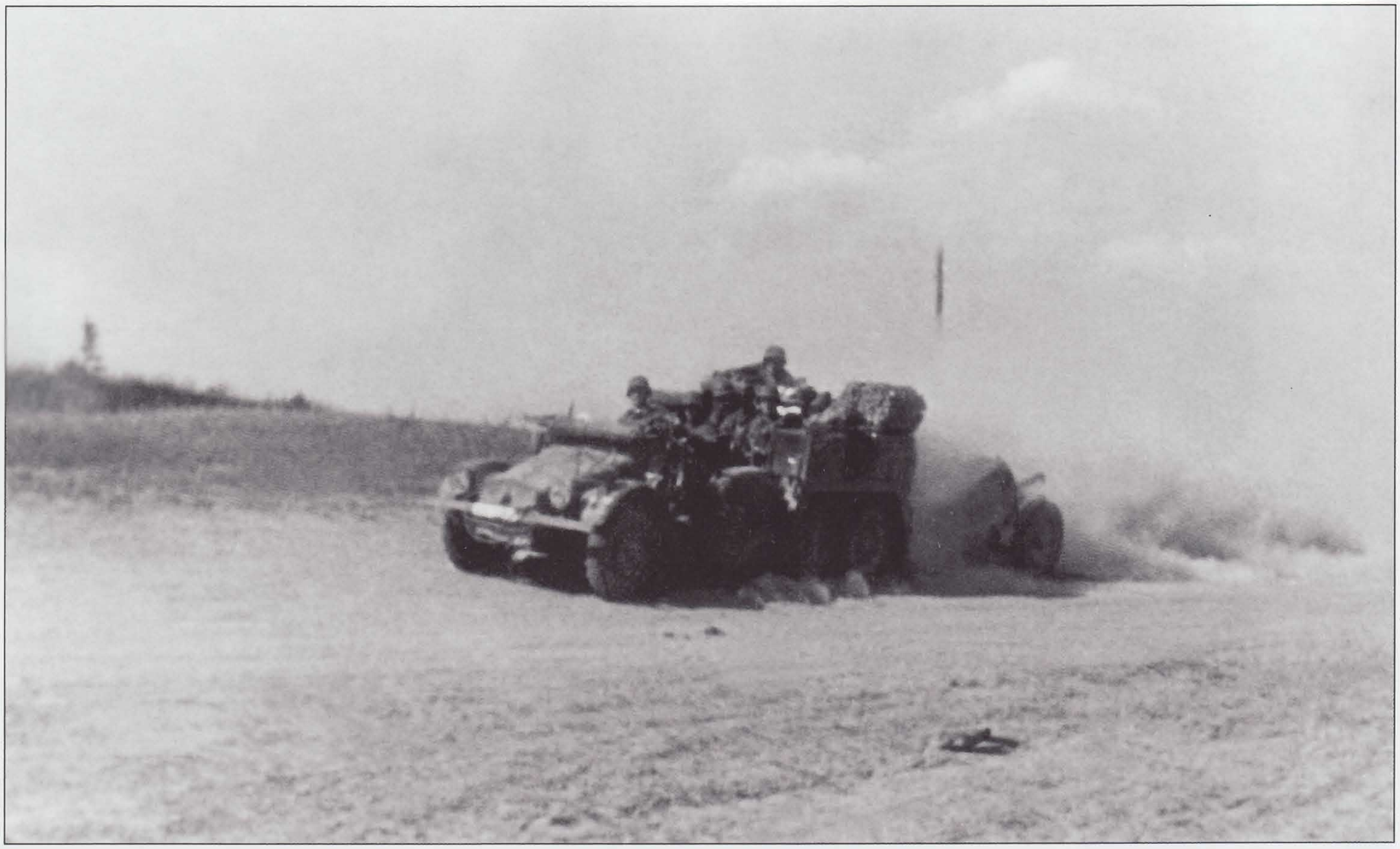
Waffen-SS troops round up Red Army soldiers, who typically outnumbered their German captors.



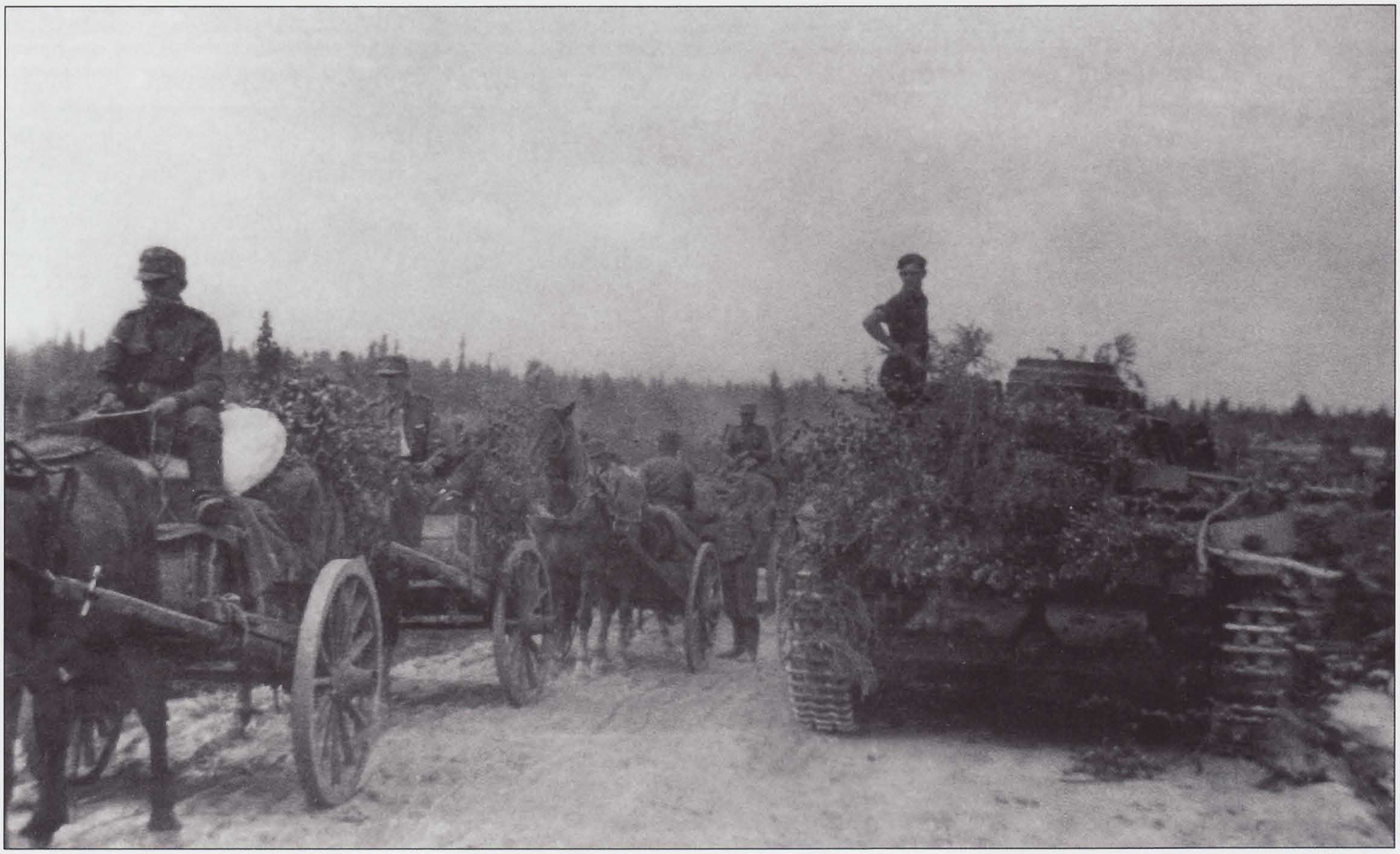
This 7.5cm l.IG18 light infantry gun has been positioned in a depression as a ready made firing position. The crew is taking a break around a "liberated" garden table. One man sits separately as an air guard. They are building shelters with overhead cover to be provided by liberated cabinet doors from a nearby house. The narrow diameter birch tree logs appear very flimsy for such construction. Straw has been collected to spread over turned soil, which is very noticeable from the air. More straw will be placed on the shelter's floor for insulation.



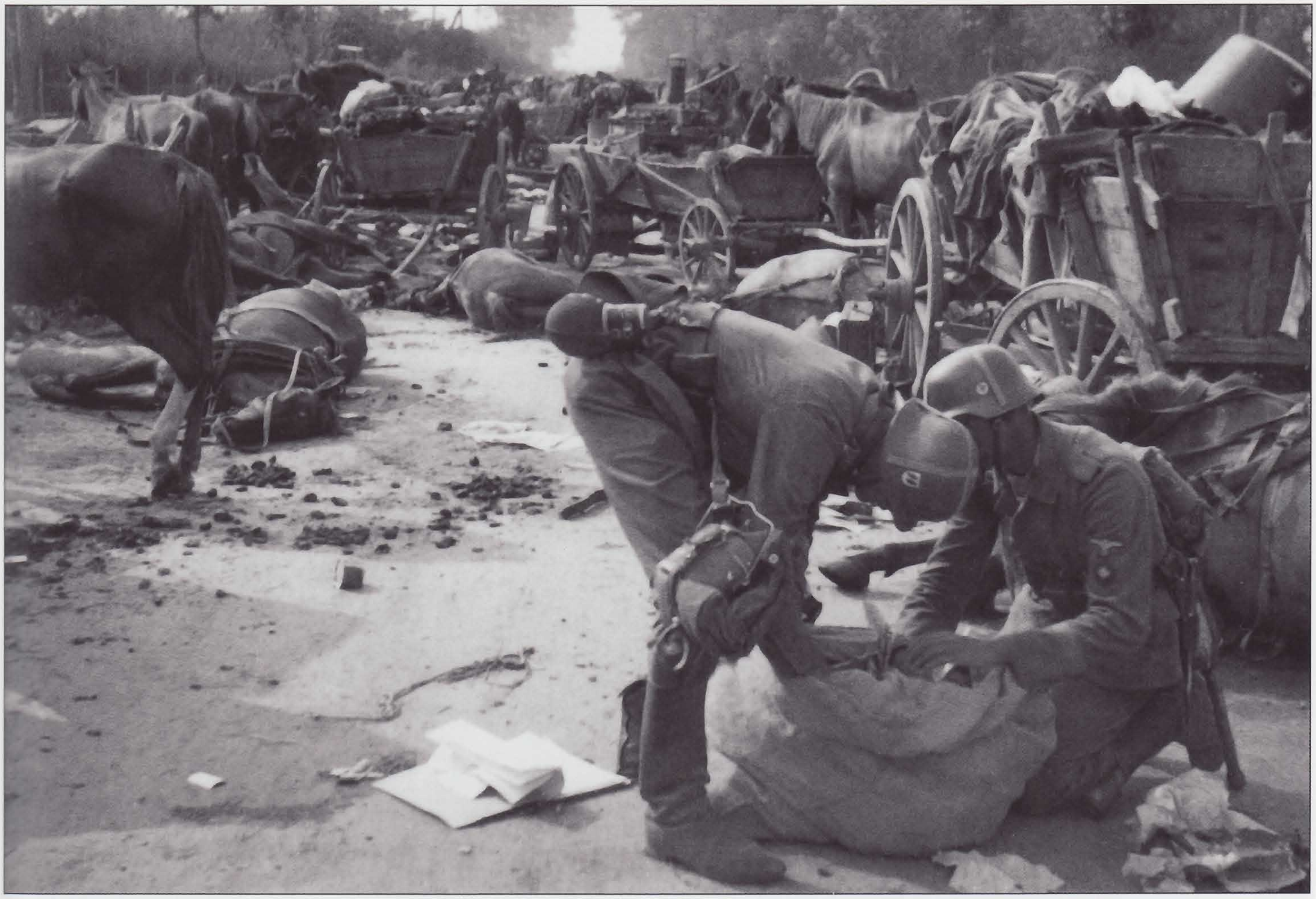
A motorized infantry unit advances in its light field cars. They are lightly camouflaged with vegetation and canvas slip-on covers have been placed over the lowered windshields to prevent aircraft-attracting reflections. The headlights have been fitted with removable blackout covers. The solo motorcycle (Solokrad) is used by a messenger (Kradmelder). The tactical symbol on the right fender is that of a motorized infantry gun company.



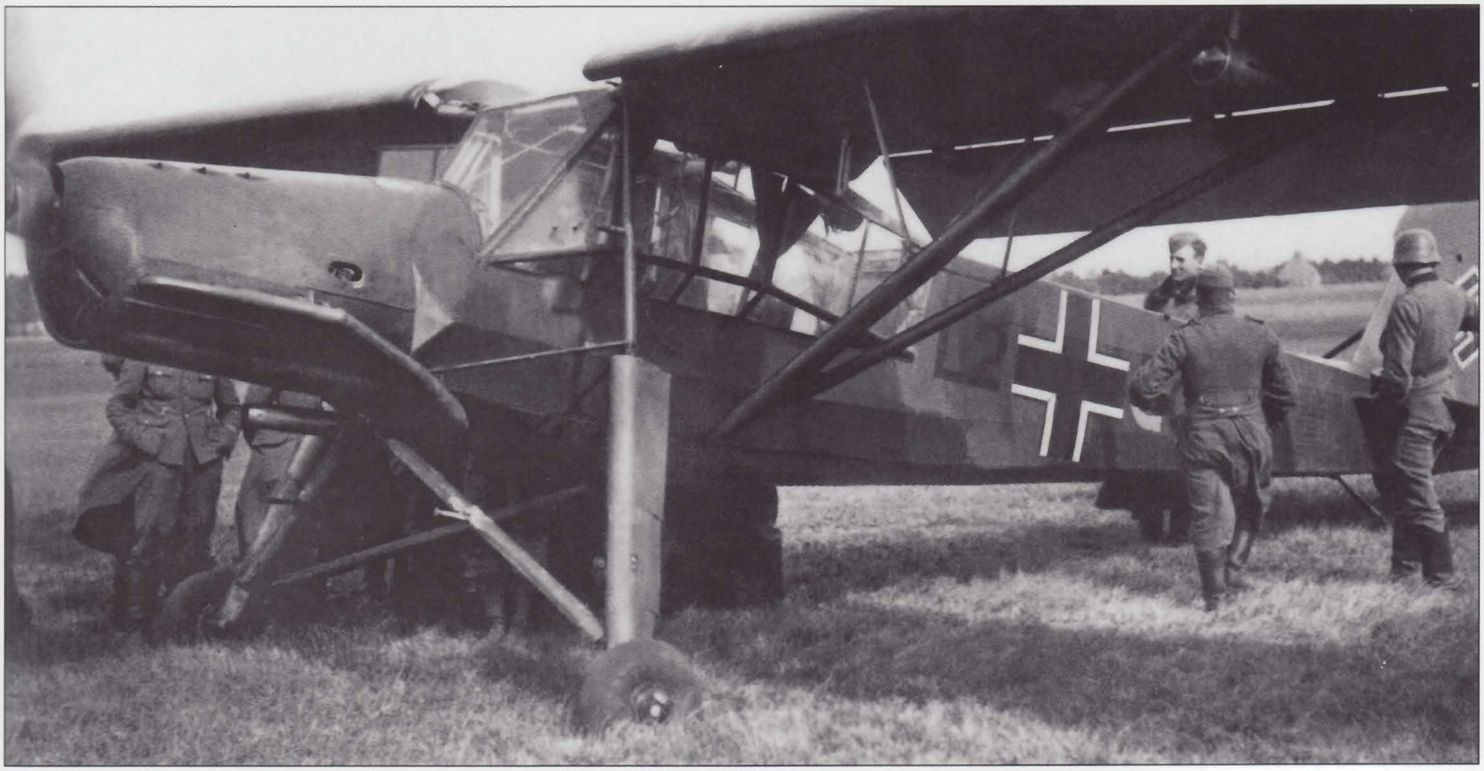
A Krupp-Protze L2H43 Kfz 69 light truck tows a 3.7cm Pak 35/36 antitank gun down a dusty road. The insistent dust proved to be brutal to men, horses, and machines. With the equally insistent autumn rains the thick layers of dust would soon turn into pasty mud that stuck to everything and then as the roads were further churned they would turn to seemingly bottomless muck.



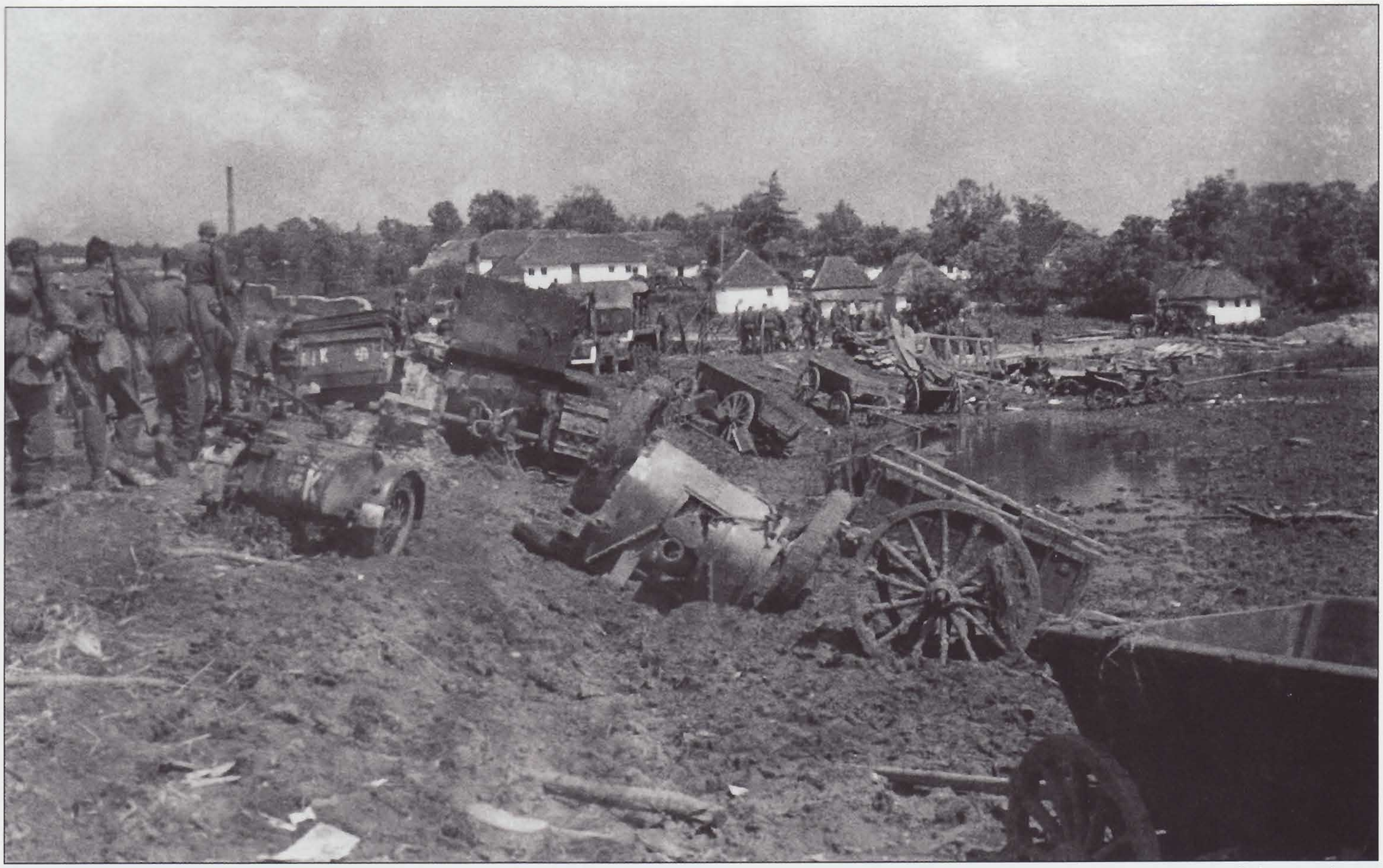
The modern and the antiquated. A well camouflaged Pz.Kpfw. III tank halted beside the road is passed by a Panjewagen column, a principal means of hauling supplies on the Eastern Front. The Panje were Russian two- and four-wheel carts drawn by small, hardy Bashkir horses. They could go places that a truck could not go, especially through mud.



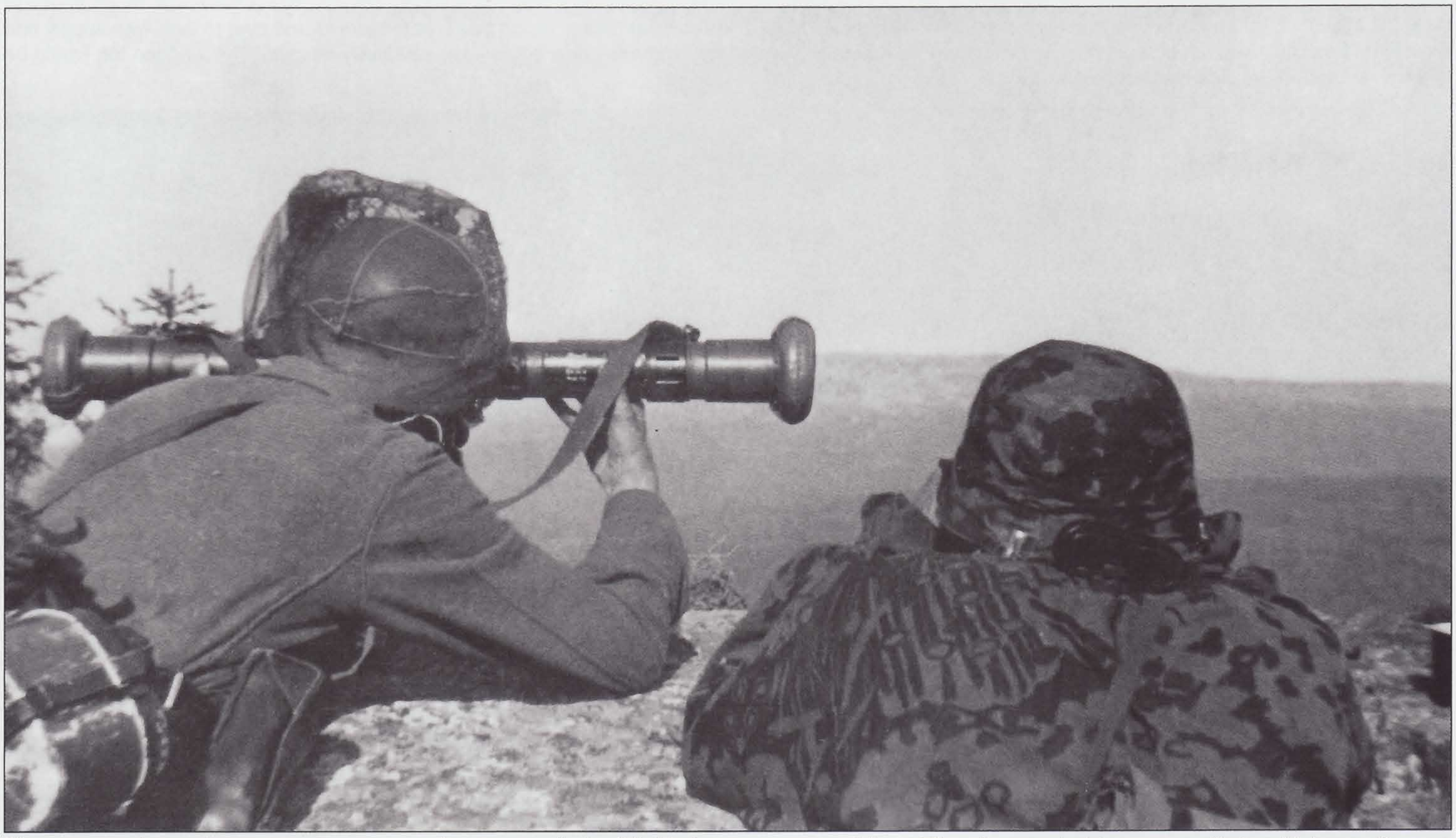
"Wiking" Division troops rummage through baggage amid the aftermath of a strafing attack on a Red Army supply column. While there was much of use to be found in such treasure trove, what they are mainly interested in is food. The surviving horses would be collected and turned over to their own supply and artillery units. Lightly wounded horses would be treated by a divisional veterinary company or a corps-level veterinary hospital. The wagons too would be taken over by German supply columns.



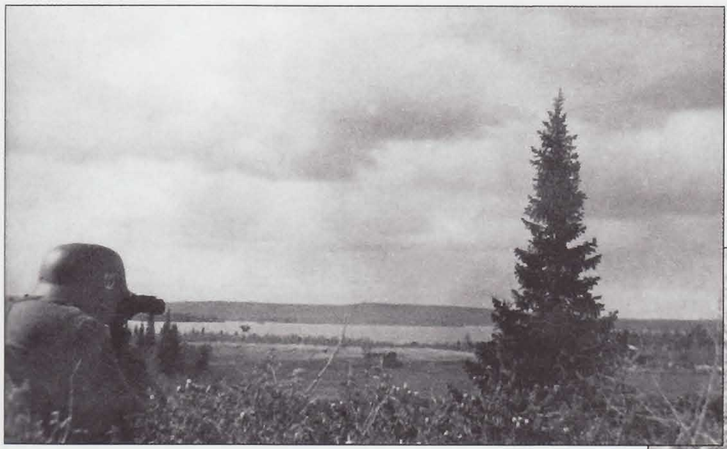
The three-seat Fieseler Fi 156C light observation aircraft, known as a Storch (Stork), was also used as an artillery spotter and courier aircraft and to transport senior officers. They were also used to deliver emergency supplies and ammunition as well as evacuate wounded. The Storch could be fitted with an extended range fuel tank or a camera pod on the belly. It was commonly seen in the skies over the frontlines.



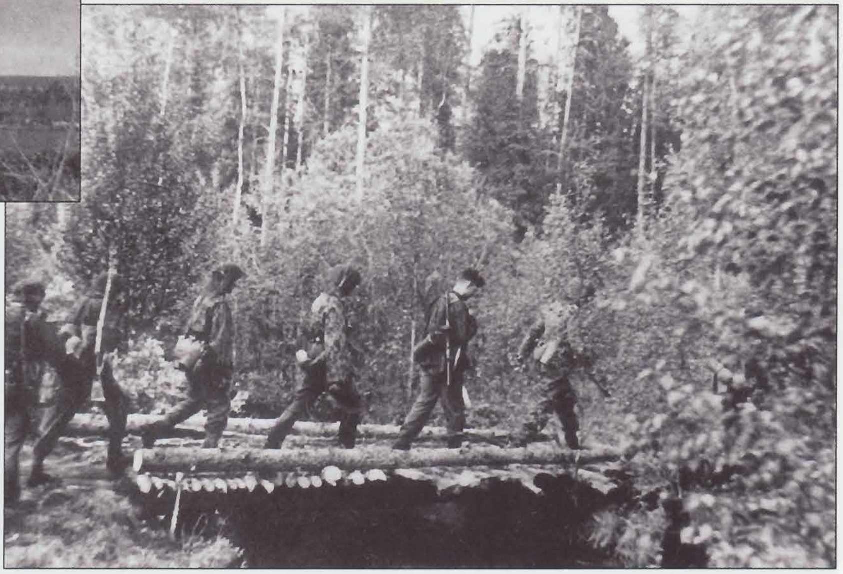
Troops march past a shattered Soviet artillery unit, probably struck by an air attack. The bodies of the men and house have been removed. Later salvage details would recover all useable equipment, wagons, and carts to be refurbished for German use. Resting upside down is an obsolete 152mm M1910 howitzer.



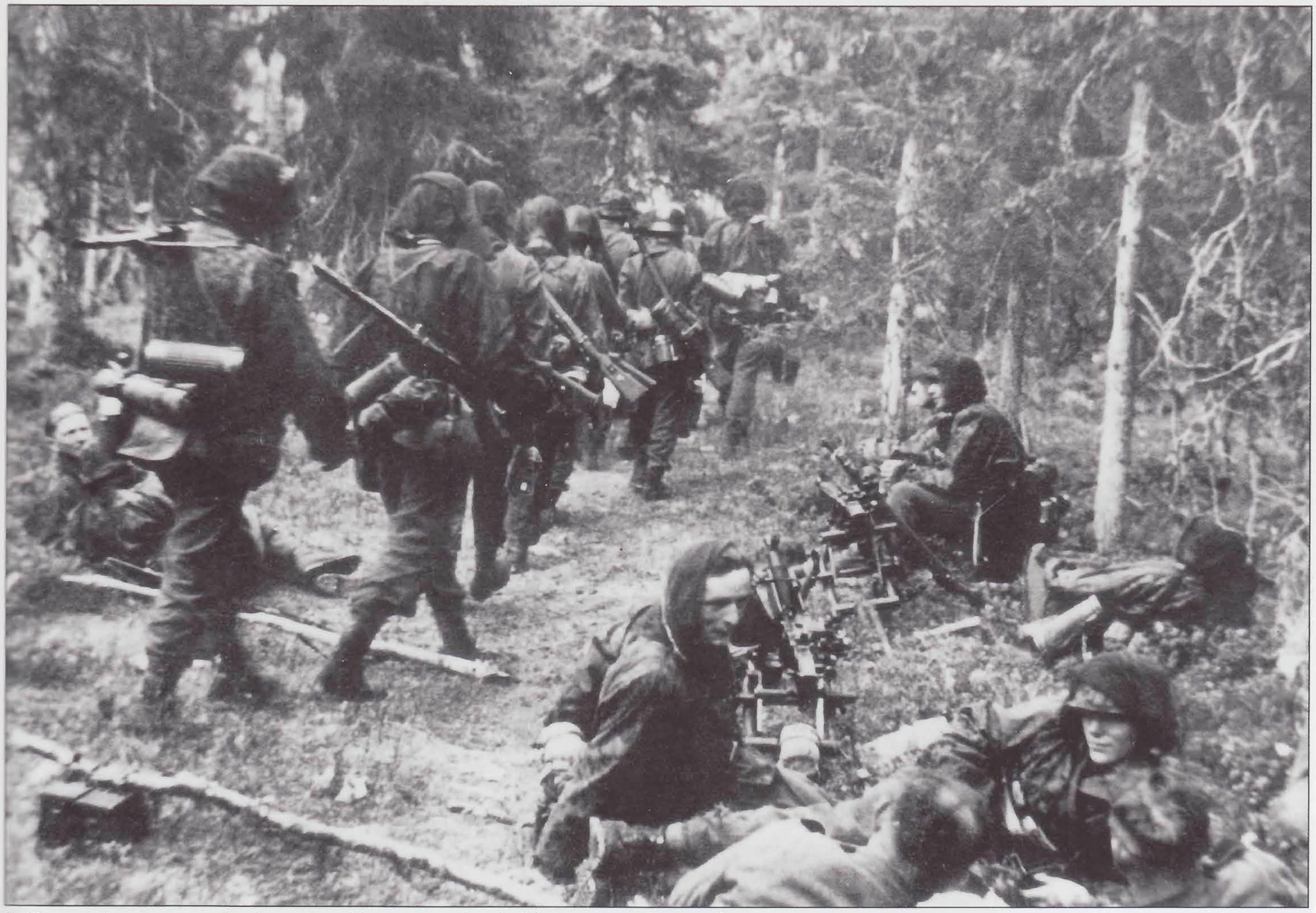
Observers estimate the range to a target using a rangefinder 34 (Entfernungsmesser 34), a 70cm base coincidence rangefinder. All larger German rangefinders were of the improved stereoscopic type. A canvas carrying case was provided for this rangefinder. The protective end pads are black leather. This soldier has a mosquito net pulled up over his helmet. The camouflage smock is an early pattern in dark green shades. Later designs were usually four-color and of lighter shades.



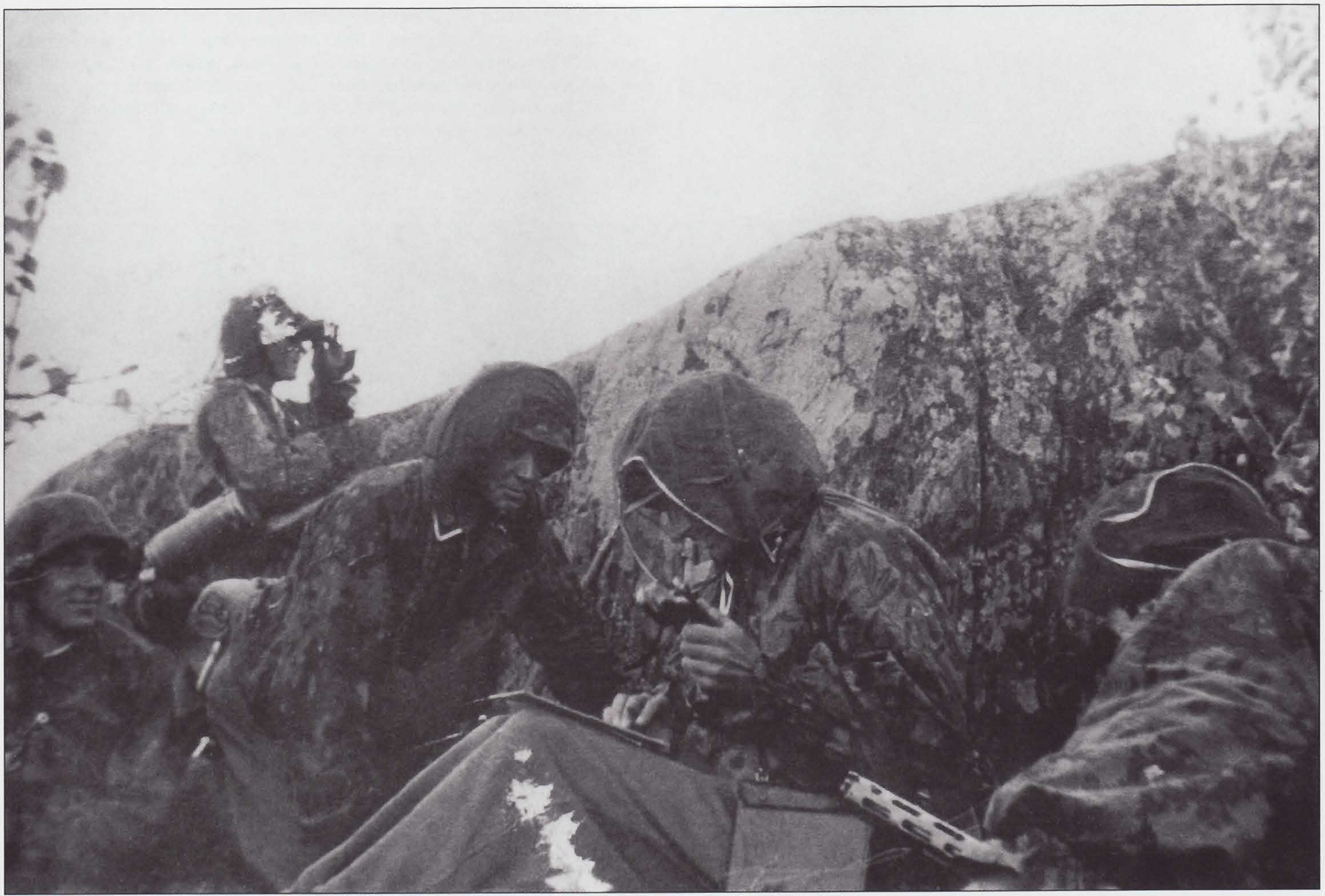
The black-on-white SS shield transfer on the right side of the steel helmet was approved in September 1935. In November 1943 it was ordered removed for camouflage purposes. The black, white, and red national escutcheon on the left side had been approved at the same time, but was ordered removed in March 1940. It was not uncommon for one or both shields to remain on some helmets to the war's end.



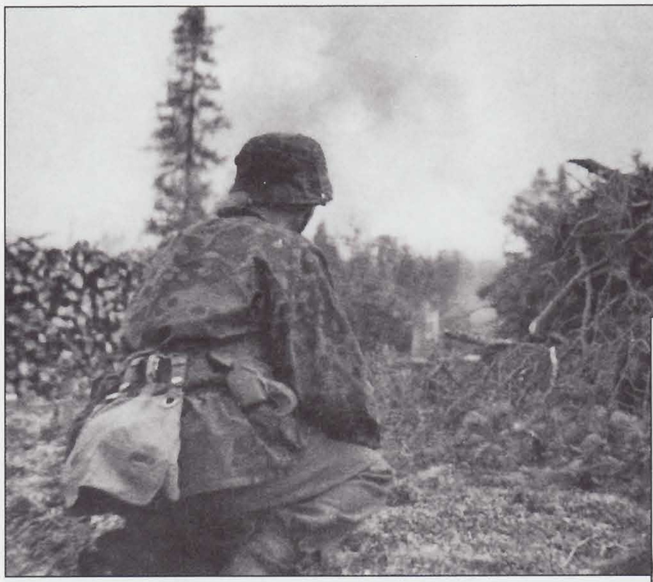
Infantrymen cross a hastily erected light traffic timber bridge. Most have mosquito head nets pulled up over their helmets. A pioneer platoon (Pionierzug) could build such a bridge in a couple of hours. No matter how rushed the construction was, a constant feature was the guide rail logs on the edges to prevent vehicles from running off or troops stumbling off in the dark.



A rifle squad passes a resting heavy machine gun section, in this case armed with MG34 machine guns. The guns are carried attached to their mounts with the extension legs removed, for ease of carrying. In this manner they can be set-up quickly in event of a sudden engagement in the forest. Such meeting engagements were frequent and the side which established superior fire first often woe regardless of manpower strength. The riflemen have to be careful not to stumble over the poles used to carry pairs of 300-round ammunition cans, a practice leaned from the locals.



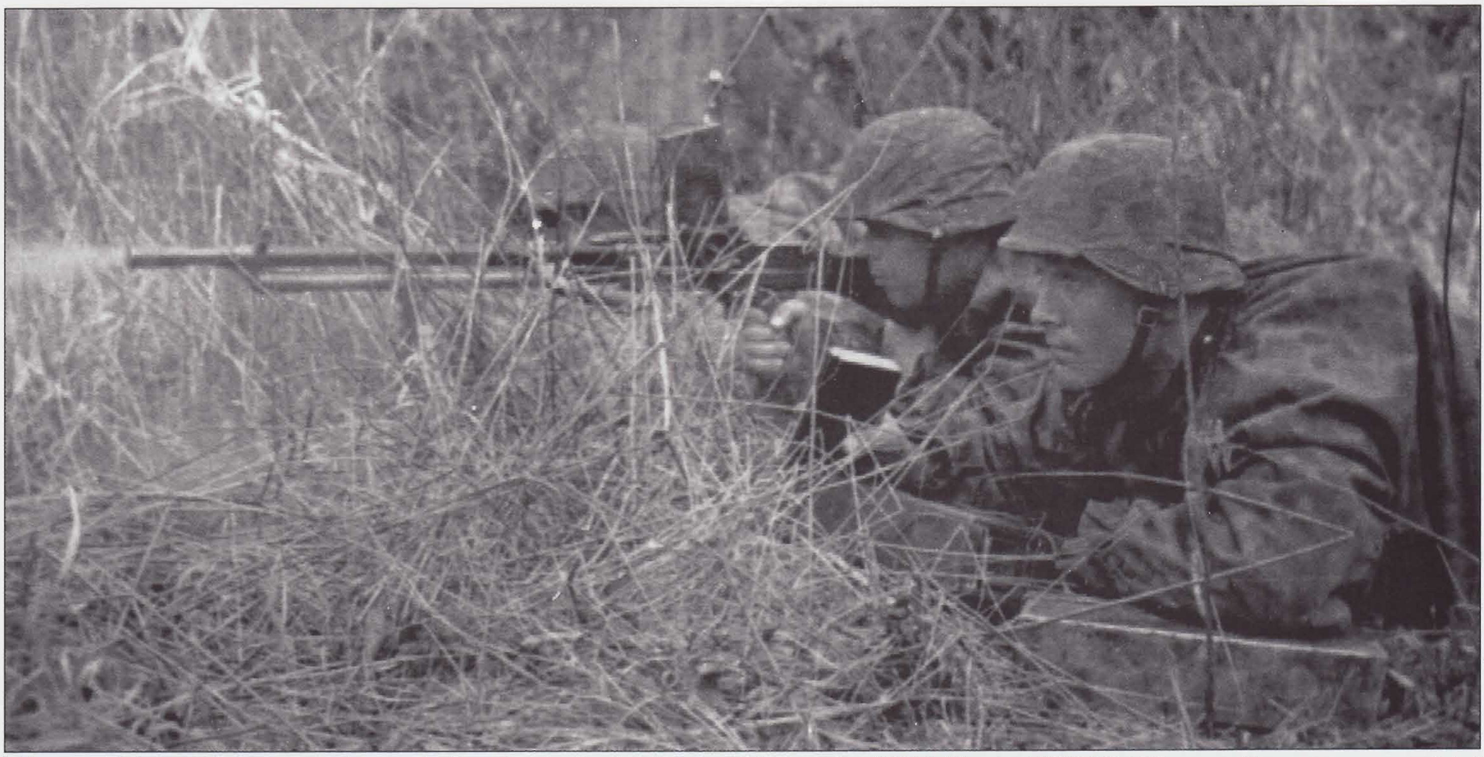
A platoon command post setup below a ridge crest. The platoon leader (Zugführer) is an SS-Untersturmführer. Besides the platoon leader the platoon troop (Zugtrupp)—platoon headquarters—consisted of the platoon troop leader (Zugtruppführer)—the platoon sergeant, and two or three messengers (Melder), and often a medic (Sanitäter). Flies and mosquito were a serious nuance in some areas, but the mosquito nets also served as camouflage and broke up the silhouette of the helmet.



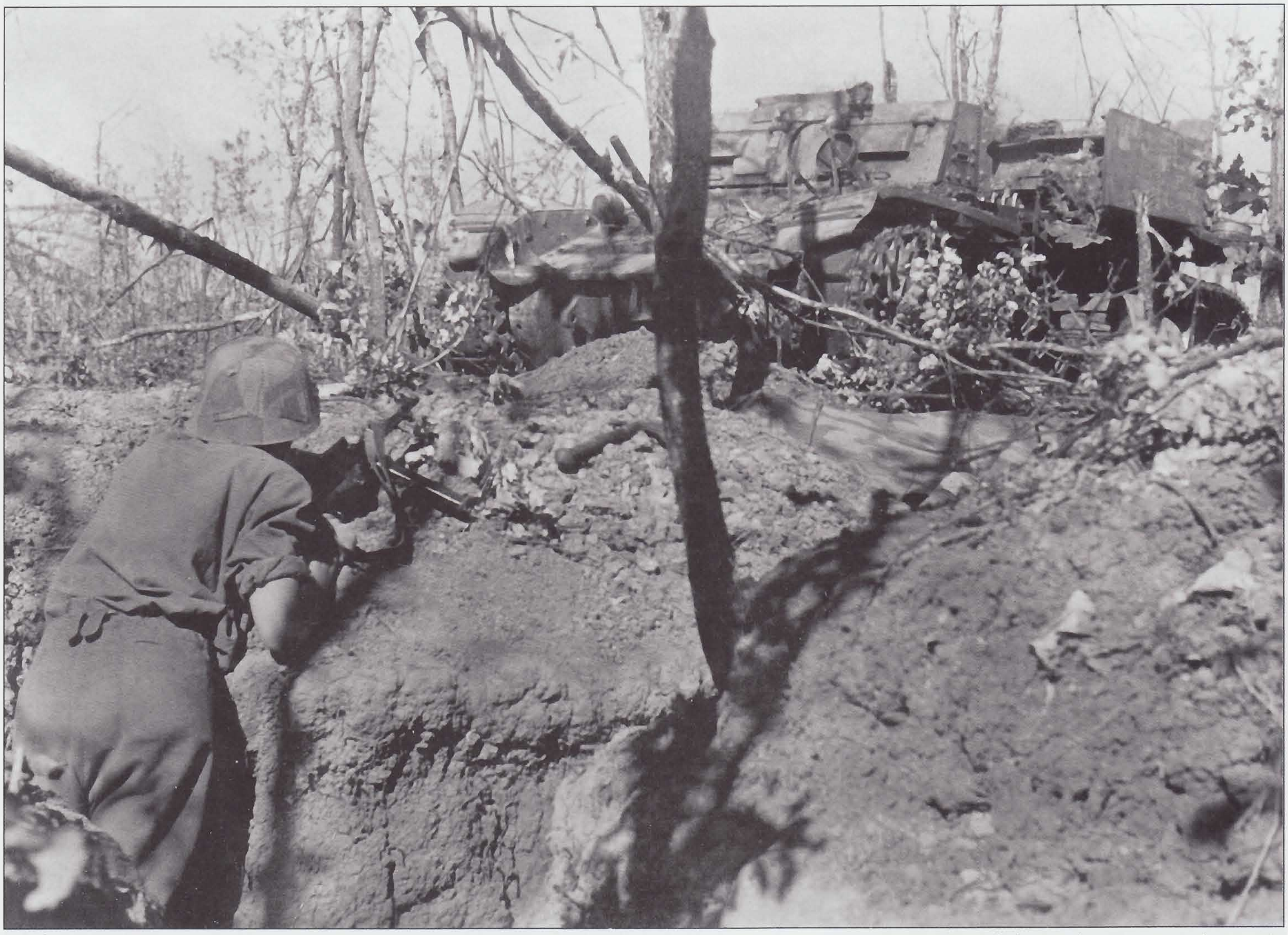
A scout (Späher) cautiously moves forward through an area where the enemy had begun clearing brush. There were no dedicated scout or reconnaissance elements within infantry regiments, all scouting and reconnaissance was conducted by rifle platoon members. This provides a good view of the Flecktarn (spotted camouflage) pattern smock.

A patrol advances up a ridge on which the Russians had begun to clear fields of fire by cutting brush and saplings. German artillery is barraging the reverse slope. Note that saplings are not cut off near ground-level, but left with 0.7- to 1-meter to provide more of a hindrance to advancing troops.

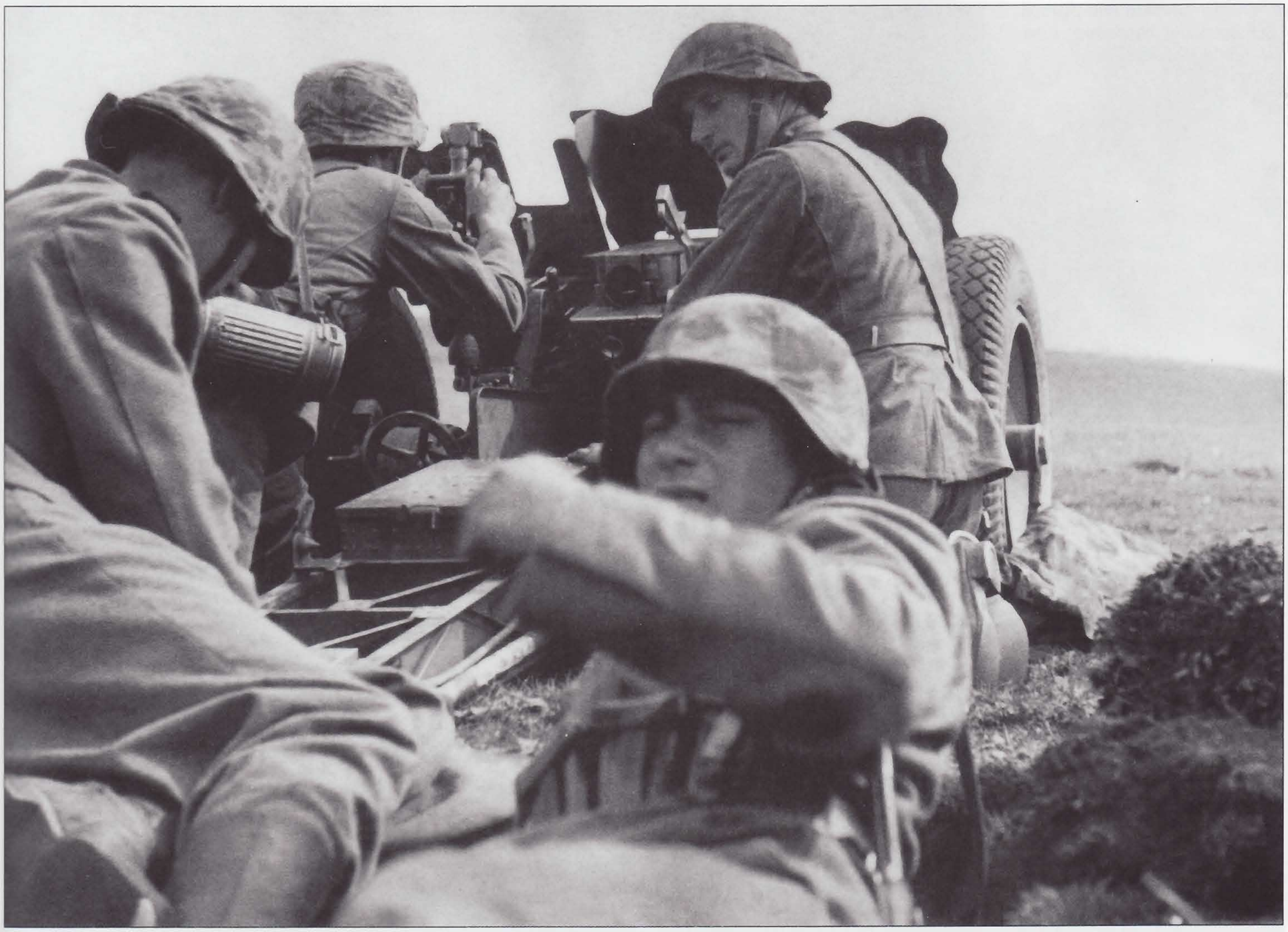
A heavy machine gun troop lays down a barrage of fire in an abandoned field in which sunflowers had begun to sprout. While a heavy machine gun troop was authorized six men, in the case of understrength units, which was more often the case, there might be only three or four men. A rifle squad's light machine gun troop was authorized three men, but typically had only two.



This squad light machine gun troop is armed with a Czechoslovak 7.9mm vz26 in lieu of an MG34. Standard MG34 Pat 34 ammunition cans were used, but instead of carrying belted ammunition each can held six 20-round magazines. A magazine provided four or five short bursts or two long bursts before reloading.

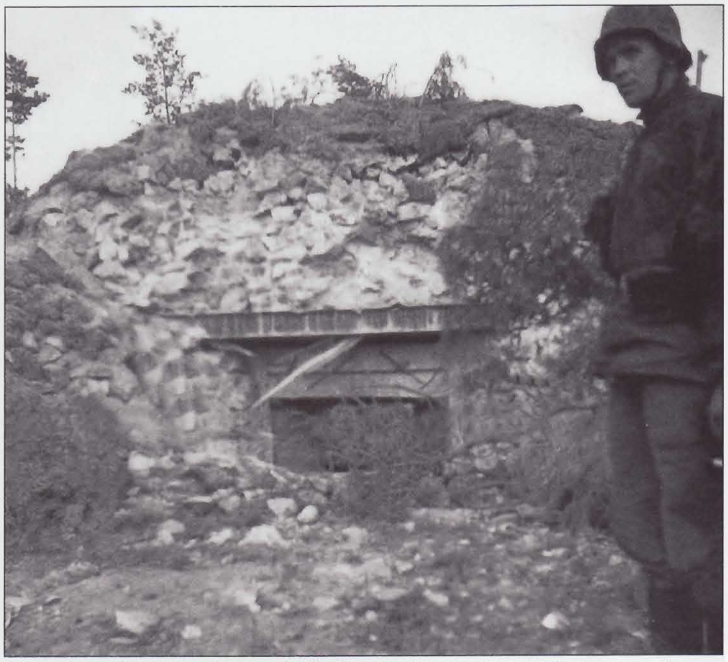


A sentry stays alert for enemy movement. A position immediately adjacent to a vehicle hulk was less than ideal as it made it easy for an enemy observer to direct fire at the position by giving the direction and distance from the conspicuous hulk.



A 7.5cm light infantry gun crew provides covering fire for an advancing infantry unit. A platoon of two guns was normally attached to each infantry battalion. They could provide supporting indirect fire from the rear or they could be positioned well forward for direct fire against enemy positions holding up the advance. An "H" can be seen on the inside of the gun shield over the shoulder of the rightmost man. This followed the artillery practice of identifying individual guns by a letter (A to D in a four-gun battery). An infantry gun company typically had eight guns (A to H).

Company command posts were manned only by minimal personnel to make them less conspicuous and more mobile. Here the company troop (company headquarters) make range charts to possible target areas and enemy approach routes. A field telephone line connects them to the battalion command post.

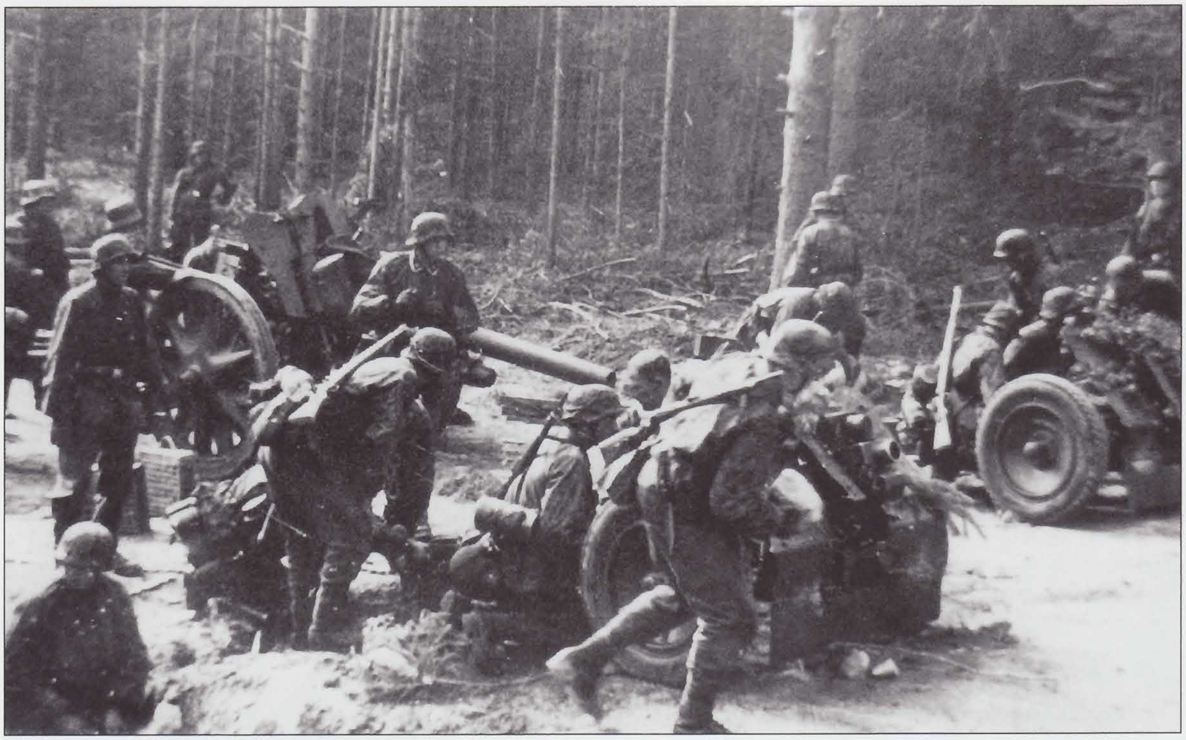


A rifleman (Schützen) stands before a battered Soviet bunker. It was basically a packed earthen mound capped with a thick layer of concrete, which was embedded with local rocks for camouflage and vegetation allowed to overgrow it. The bunker appears to have taken numerous hits from infantry guns, which knocked many of the embedded rocks off.

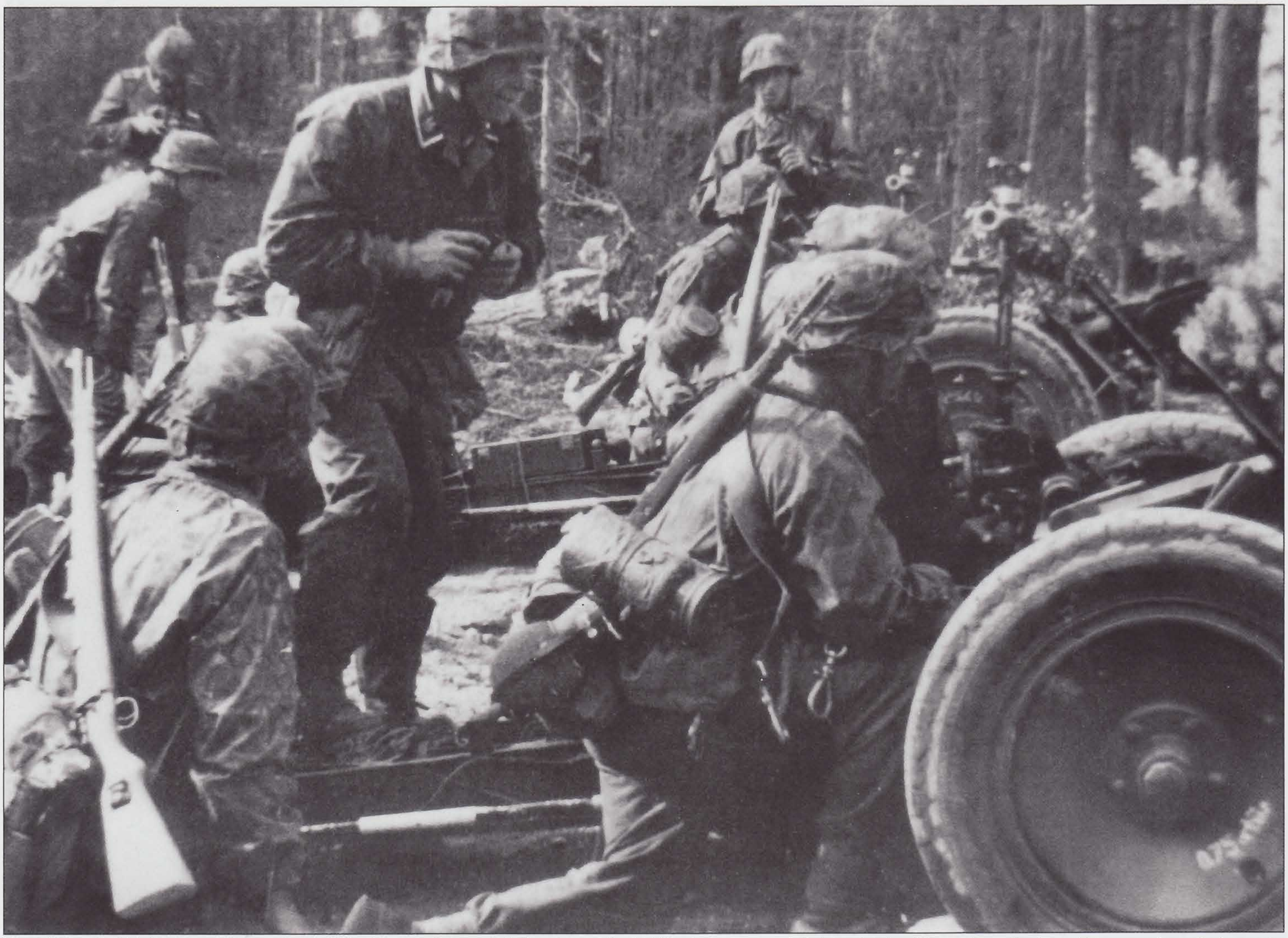
A "Wiking" Division rifle platoon (Schützenzug) assembles after clearing a Russian village.

Cornfields, with sufficiently high stalks, provide a concealed approach route. Movement had to be slow as a speeding tank would create a noticeable disturbance among the tops of the stalks. It could be difficult to maintain orientation as visibility was only two or three meters.

Scenes of a unit bivouacked in a cornfield depicting everyday routine, such as cleaning and packing gear. While offering concealment, the corn stalks provided little protection from the sun.



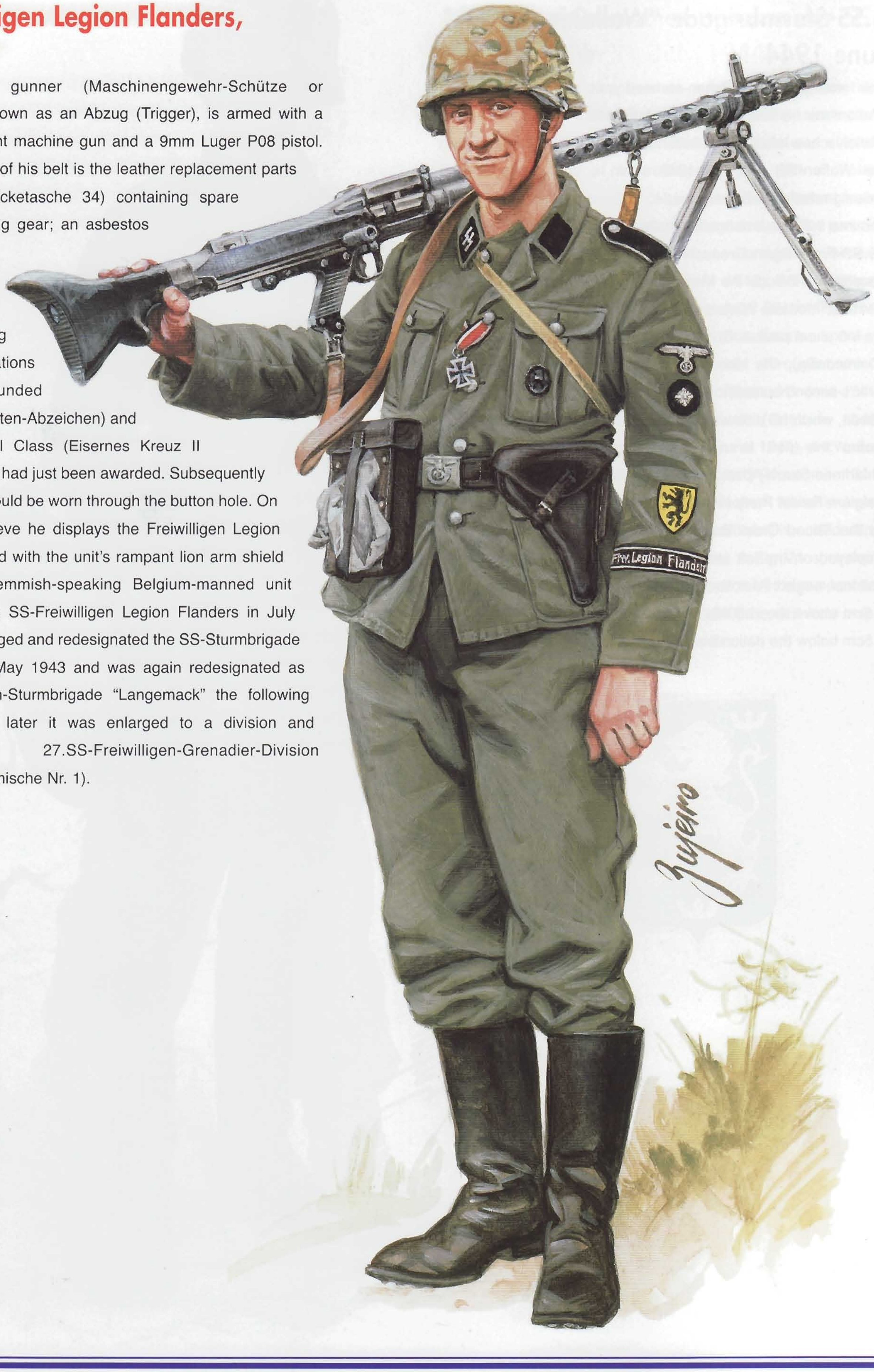
In forests there were few clearings and other sites suitable for setting up indirect-fire weapons such as mortar, infantry guns, and artillery. For this reason these weapons were frequently setup on the few available roads to provide them a clear field of fire. They were not ideal as the narrow cleared strip still very much restricted the field of fire unless the road was oriented in the right direction. Here two 7.5cm l.IG18 light infantry guns are readied for firing. The infantry regiment's infantry gun company typically had four or six of these little, but valuable, fire support weapons. The company may have also had two 15cm heavy infantry guns. In the background a 10.5cm l.FH18 light field howitzer is towed past.



The 7.5cm light infantry gun was the result of a requirement dating from World War I. A compact, lightweight artillery piece that could be manhandled across a shell-battered no-man's-land or other rough terrain was needed to allow some degree of artillery support to the infantry. The gun could also be towed by light field cars or a pair of horses. It was designed to provide both direct fire against machine gun nests, pillboxes, defended building, etc. and indirect-fire against small area targets, troops in the open, etc. The loader beside the tire has a heavy duty leather hauling sling (Schleppriemen) slung over his shoulder to aid with manhandling the weapon into firing position.

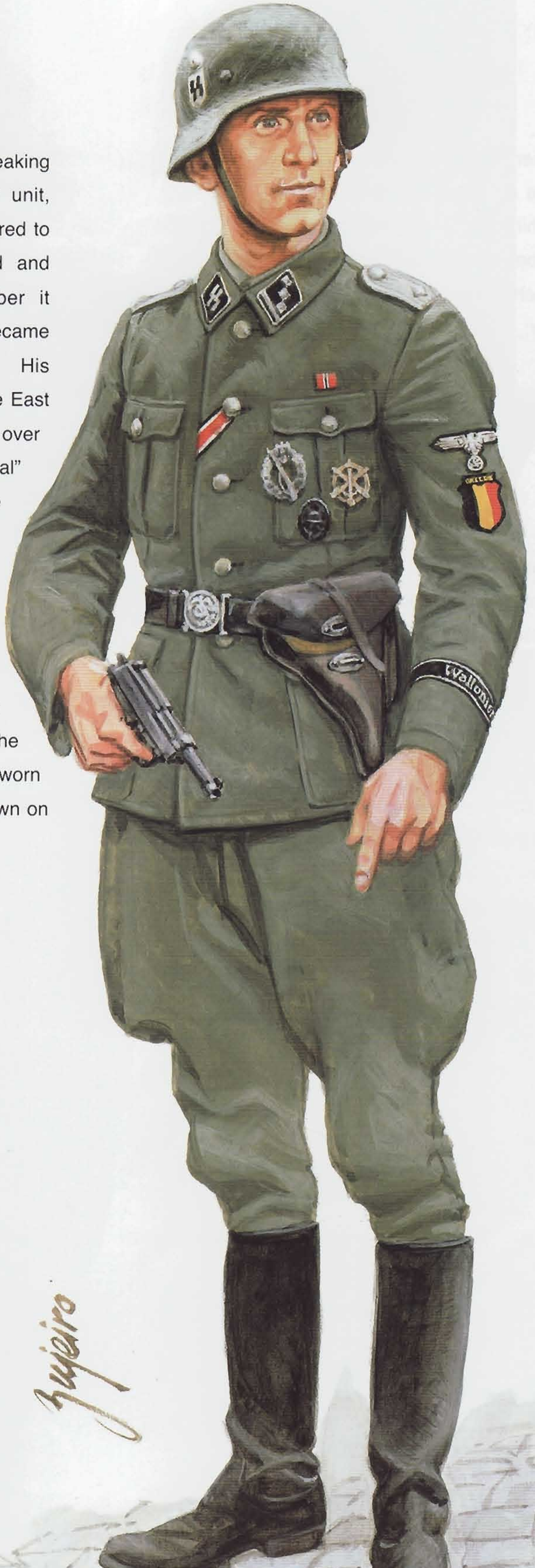
SS-Oberschütze, SS-Freiwilligen Legion Flanders, June 1942

This machine gunner (Maschinengewehr-Schütze or Richtschütze), known as an Abzug (Trigger), is armed with a 7.9mm MG34 light machine gun and a 9mm Luger P08 pistol. On the right front of his belt is the leather replacement parts pouch (Ersatzstücketasche 34) containing spare parts and cleaning gear; an asbestos glove for changing barrels is held under the securing strap. His decorations include the Wounded Badge (Verwundeten-Abzeichen) and the Iron Cross II Class (Eisernes Kreuz II Klasse), which he had just been awarded. Subsequently only the ribbon would be worn through the button hole. On his lower left sleeve he displays the Freiwilligen Legion Flanders cuff band with the unit's rampant lion arm shield over it. This Flemmish-speaking Belgium-manned unit began life as the SS-Freiwilligen Legion Flanders in July 1941. It was enlarged and redesignated the SS-Sturmbrigade "Langemack" in May 1943 and was again redesignated as 6.SS- Freiwilligen-Sturmbrigade "Langemack" the following October. A year later it was enlarged to a division and redesignated 27.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Langemack" (flämische Nr. 1).



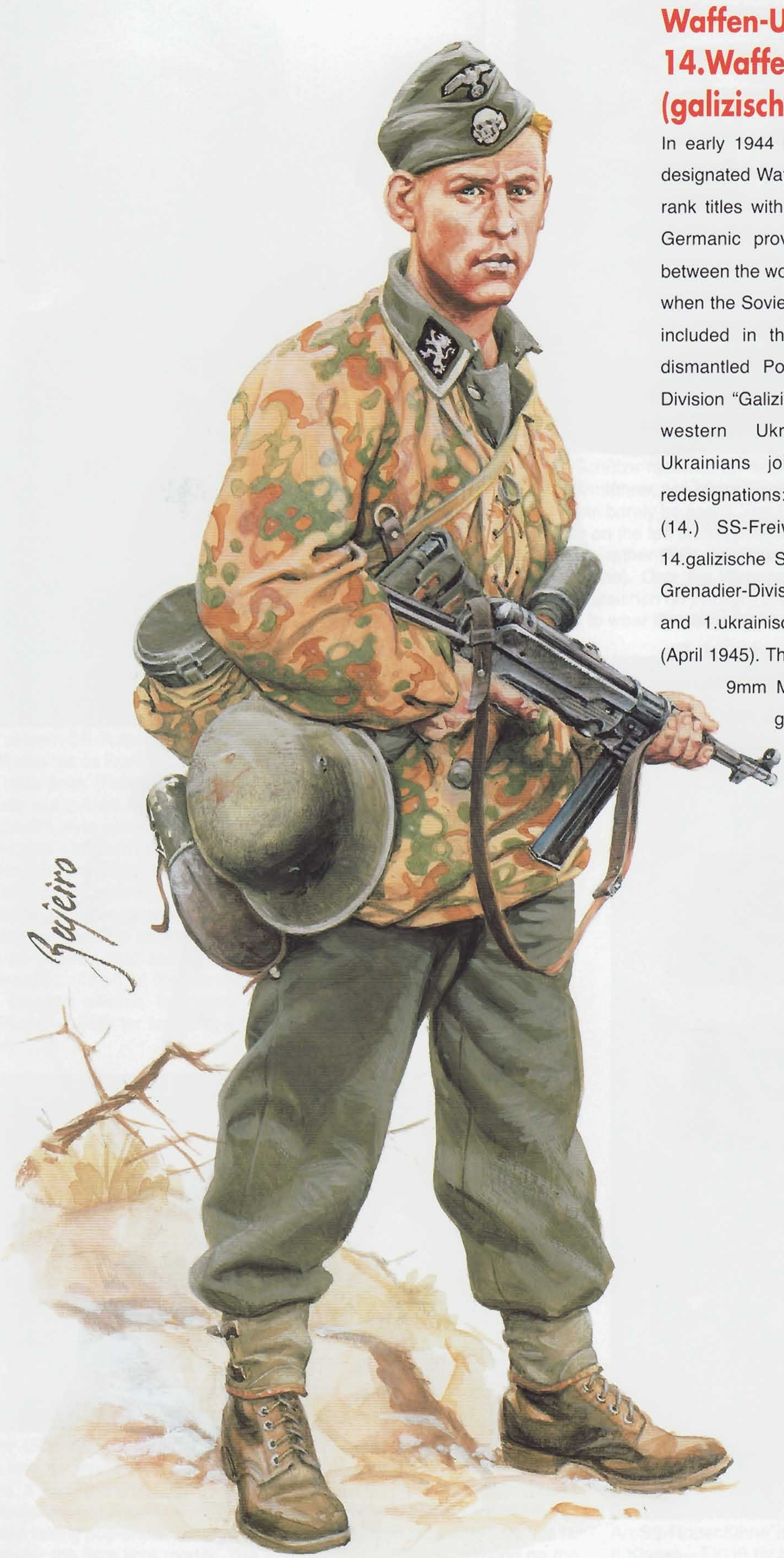
SS-Oberstrumführer, 5.SS-Sturmbrigade "Wallonien", June 1944

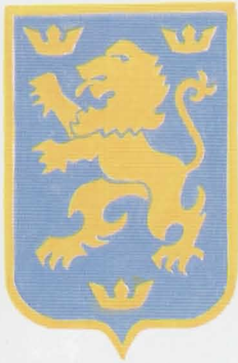
This was another Belgium-manned unit of French-speaking Wallonians. It was raised in late 1941 as a Heer unit, Wallonisches-Infanterie-Bataillon 373, which was transferred to the Waffen-SS in June 1943 when it was enlarged and redesignated SS-Sturmbrigade "Wallonien." In October it became 5.SS-Sturmbrigade "Wallonien." A year later it became 28.SS-Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Wallonien." His decorations include the Medal for the Winter Battle in the East 1941/42 (Medaille Winterschlacht im Osten 1941/42) worn over the left chest pocket. Commonly known as the "East Medal" (Ostmedaille), the ribbon was often worn through the tunic's second button hole as was the Iron Cross II Class ribbon, which he also wears. On his left chest pocket he wears the (left to right): Infantry Assault Badge (Infanterie-Sturm-Abzeichen), Wounded Badge, and the Belgium Rexist Party Honor Badge of Rex (also known as the "Blood Order Badge"). The Wallonien cuff title is displayed on the left sleeve and the unit shield below the national eagle. Prior to 1944 such shields were to be worn 1.5cm above the cuff title. From 1944 they were to be sewn on 1.5cm below the national eagle.



Waffen-Unterscharführer, 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (galizische Nr. 1), July 1944

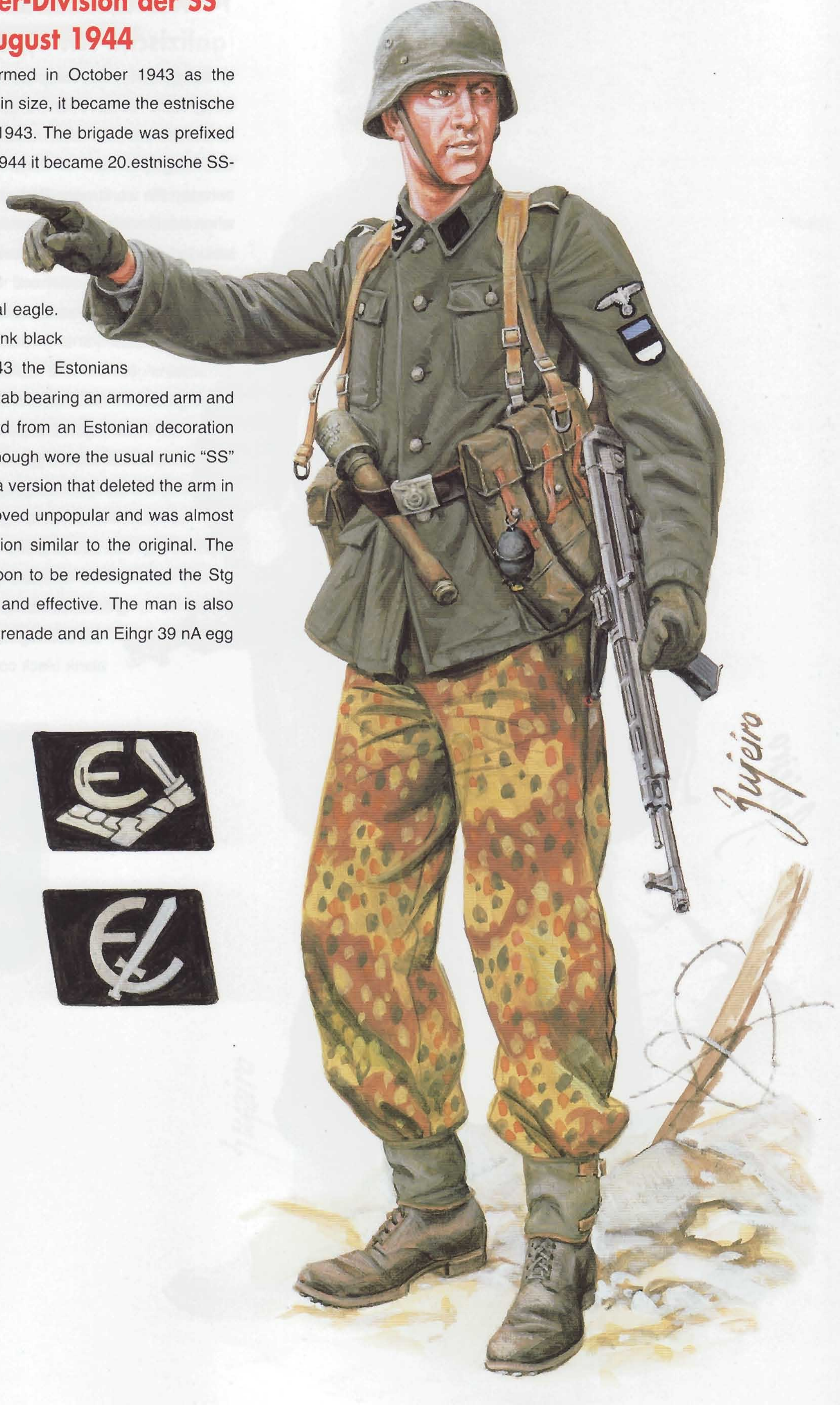
In early 1944 units comprised of non-German personnel and designated Waffen…der SS were no longer authorized to prefix rank titles with SS-, but rather Waffen-. Galicia was a former Germanic province of Austro-Hungary and part of Poland between the world wars. Part of it was absorbed into the Ukraine when the Soviets invaded eastern Poland and another part was included in the Generalgouvernment—German-administered dismantled Poland. Formed in April 1943, SS-Freiwilligen-Division "Galizien" was composed mainly of German-speaking western Ukrainians. Gradually non-German-speaking Ukrainians joined the ranks. It went through several redesignations: SS-Schützen-Division "Galizien" (mid-1943), (14.) SS-Freiwilligen-Division "Galizien" (October 1943), 14.galizische SS-Freiwilligen-Division (June 1944), 14.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (ukranische Nr. 1) (November 1944), and 1.ukrainische Division der ukrainischen National-Armee (April 1945). This squad leader (Gruppenführer) is armed with a 9mm MP40 machine pistol and a Stg 24 stick hand grenade. Prior to the adoption of the rampant lion collar badge in late 1943, the unit wore only a blank black collar patch.

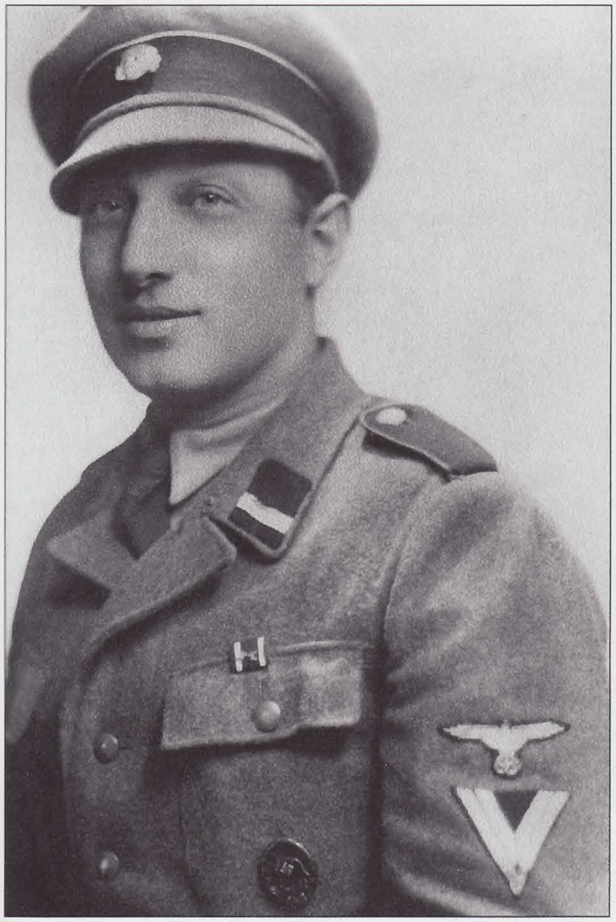




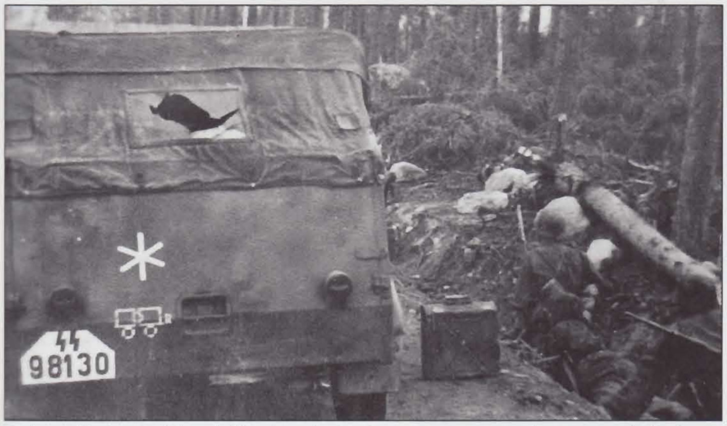
Waffen-Schütze, 20.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (estnische Nr. 1), August 1944

The first Estonian unit was formed in October 1943 as the estnische SS-Legion. Increased in size, it became the estnische SS-Freiwilligen-Brigade in May 1943. The brigade was prefixed with "3." in October. In January 1944 it became 20.estnische SS-Freiwilligen-Division and finally 20.Waffen-Grenadier-Division der SS (estnische Nr. 1) in May. The Estonian Legion shield is worn below the national eagle. The Legion originally wore a blank black right collar tab, but in late 1943 the Estonians adopted an unofficial right collar tab bearing an armored arm and sword with a stylized "E" derived from an Estonian decoration (upper insert). Many members though wore the usual runic "SS" collar tab. The Germans issued a version that deleted the arm in mid-1944 (lower insert). This proved unpopular and was almost immediately replaced by a version similar to the original. The 7.9mm MP44 machine pistol (soon to be redesignated the Stg 44 assault rifle) proved popular and effective. The man is also armed with a Stg 24 stick hand grenade and an Eihgr 39 nA egg hand grenade, new type.

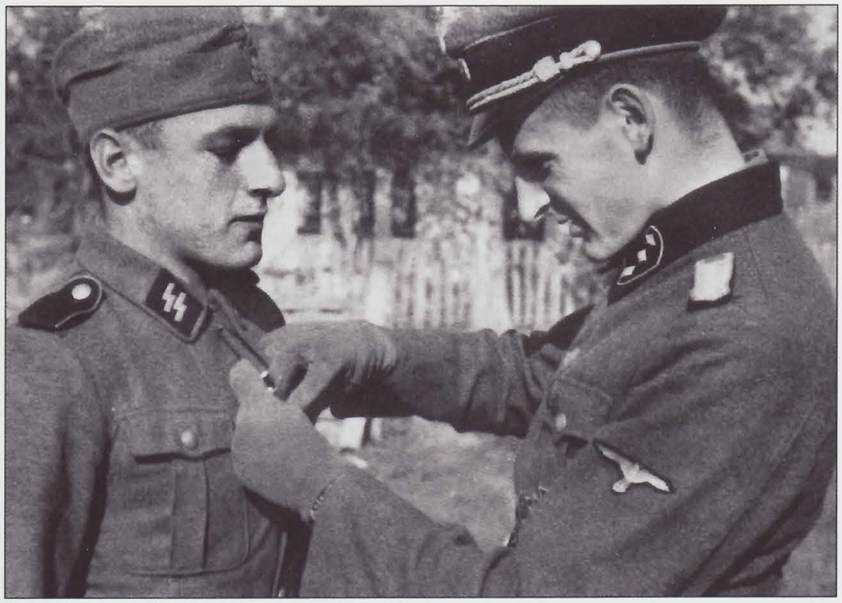




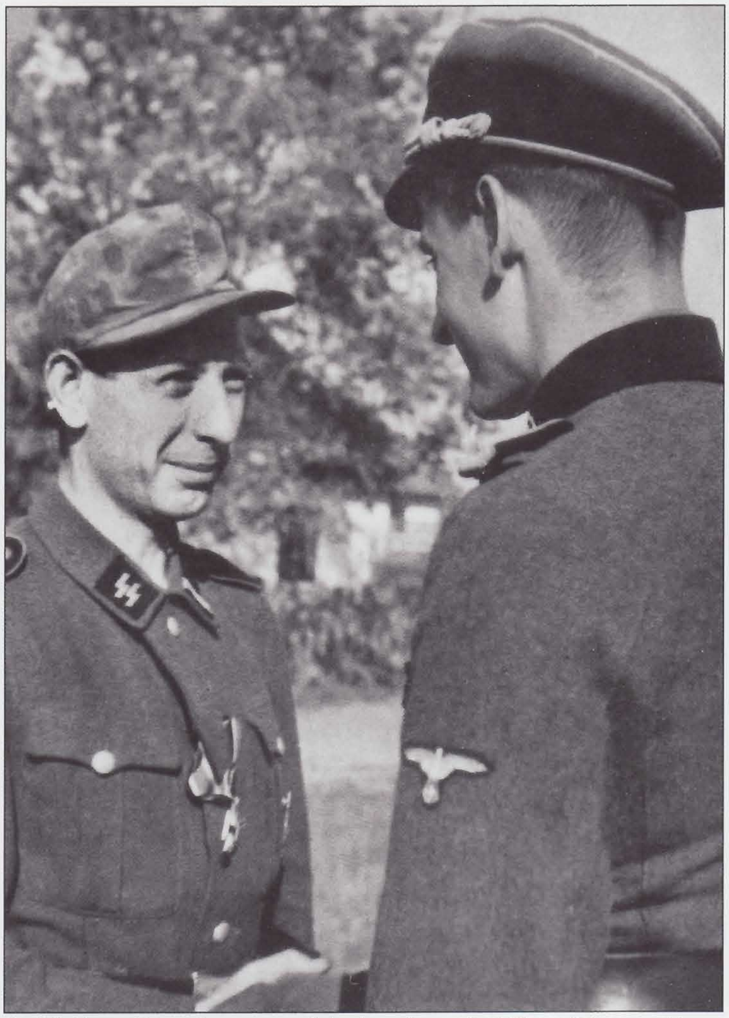
This veteran SS-Rottenführer displays the numerous distinctions identifying his as Waffen-SS: NCO's old style field cap for NCOs with cloth peak (Feldmütze für Unterführer)—which he was not actually authorized to wear—with the death head (Tottenkopf) and the SS style national eagle (Hoheitsabzeichen) above it, the open-collar tunic with light brown shirt and black necktie, black Waffen-SS rank collar tab (black SS tab on right collar), black shoulder straps with white (infantry) Waffenfarbe piping, and the SS-Rottenführer chevrons and SS style national eagle are silver-colored on black. He wears a black wound badge indicating one to three wounds and above the left breast pocket is the red, white-edged ribbon of the German Social Welfare Decoration with crossed swords indicating it was won under combat conditions, usually for rescuing a fellow soldier or some similar action.



Sniper (Scharfschütze) fire has halted a convoy on a forest road. Snipers were an effective means of harassing and delaying the advance of enemy troops. It was seldom that "snipers" were actually fully trained sharpshooters with telescope-equipped rifles. They were more often small groups of regular riflemen taking pop-shots. Sitting on the roadside is the steel container for 10 rounds for the 5cm light mortar. The white unit identification marking on the light field car is for the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord," which was more commonly displayed on a shield. The tactical symbol below it is for the signals platoon of a motorized infantry unit.

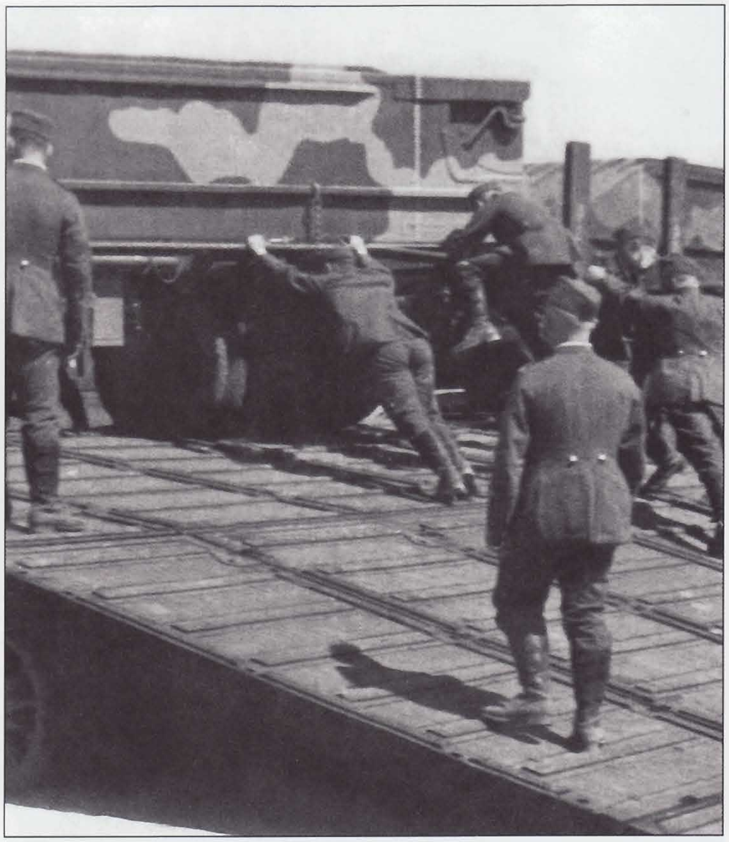


An SS-Schütze received an Iron Cross 1st Class for his company commander, an SS-Untersturmführer. He himself wears the Iron Cross 1st Class on his left breast pocket (which can barely be seen). The EK I did not have a ribbon. Only the cross was displayed centered on the left breast pocket. The Waffen-SS wore its Hoheitsabzeichen on the left upper arm rather than over the right breast pocket as the Wehrmacht (Heer, Luftwaffe, Kriegsmarine). Only the Wehrmacht, the defenders of the Fatherland, could wear the Hoheitsabzeichen on the right breast. All other government and party organizations were required to wear it elsewhere on their uniforms.



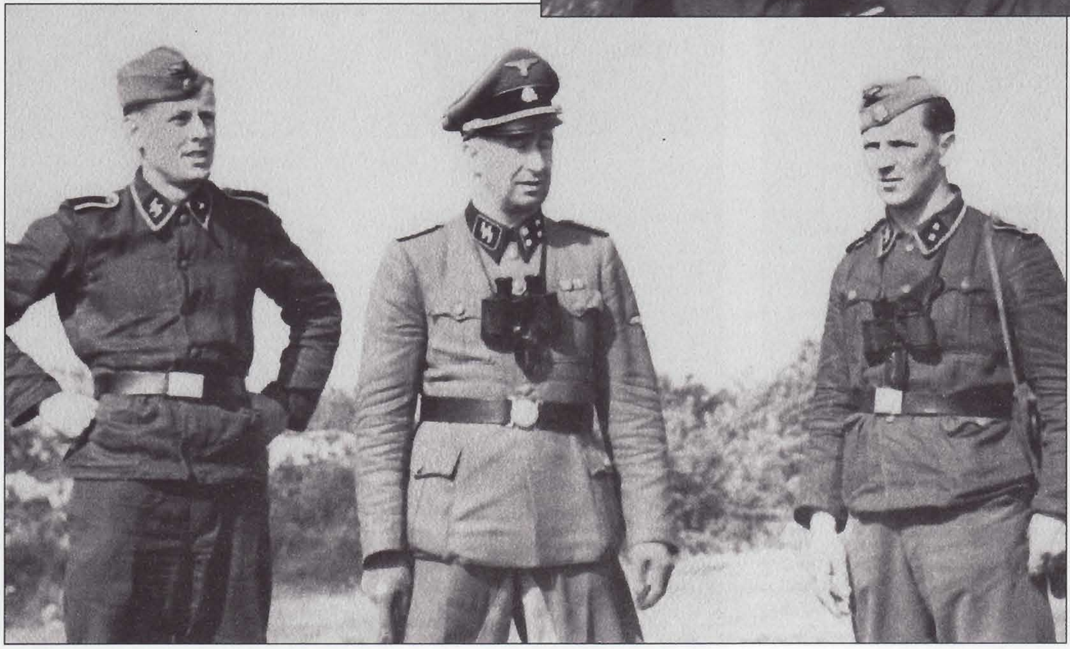
An SS-Rottenführer is presented the Iron Cross 2nd Class (Eisernes Kreuz II Klasse—EK II) by his commanding officer. Referred to by soldiers simply as die Kreuz, the ribbon with the cross was worn through the tunic's second button hole only on the day of presentation. After that only the ribbon was displayed.

Roasting a scarce chicken on a spit. Fresh meat of any kind was quite rare and a special treat. Efforts were made to reduce the amount of smoke from fires. It did not take many small fires in a unit area to create an identifiable haze or plume of smoke hanging over a forest to attract artillery. Fires were kept small and dry, hard woods were used along with charcoal to reduce smoke.

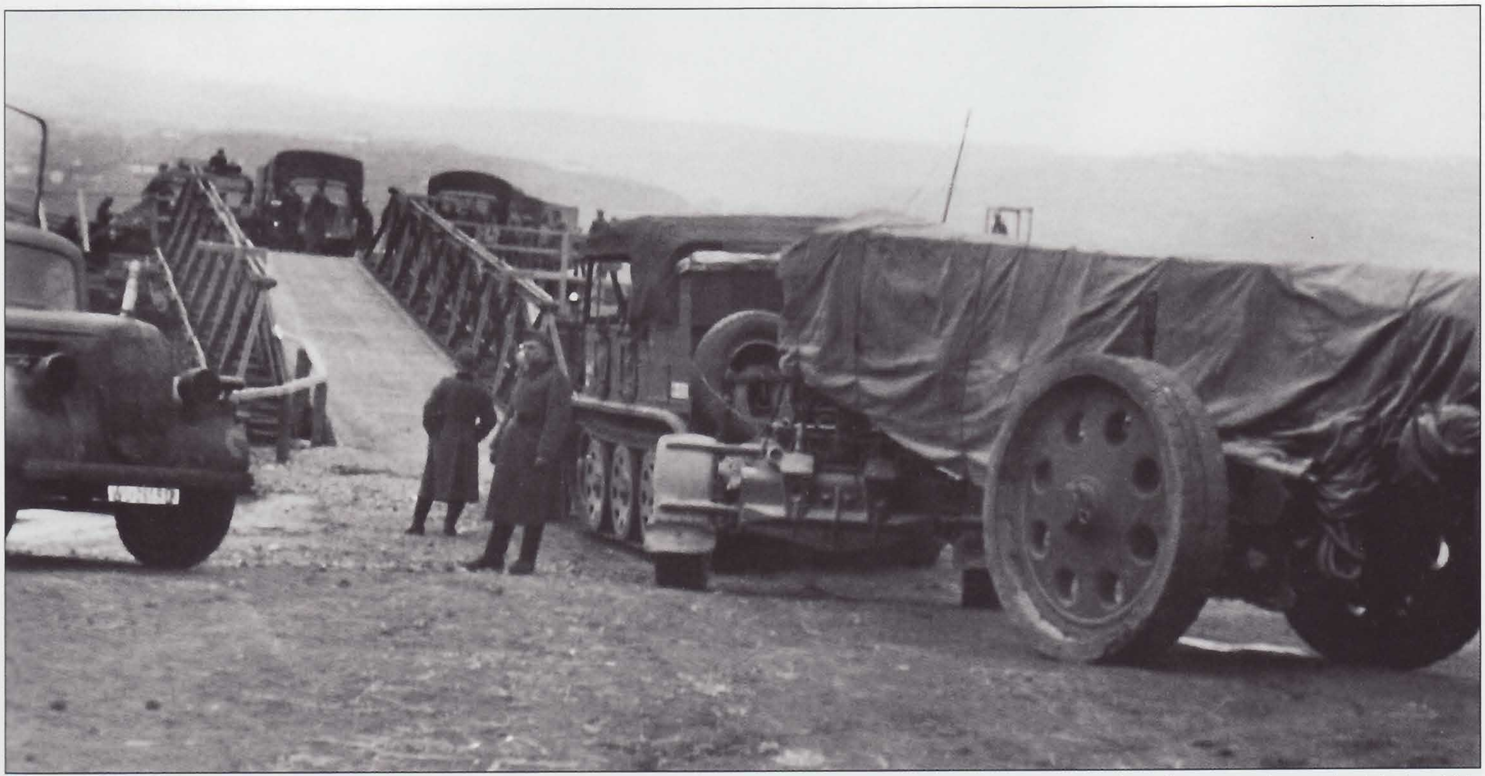


Pioneer troops maneuver a Pf 11 Pontonwagen on to a railroad flatcar. A pioneer bridge column B (Brückenkolonne B), a company-size unit of the divisional pioneer battalion, had eight such trailers each carrying plus four Pf 10 Bockwagen carrying ramps, bridge decking, and fittings. Each Pontonwagen carried one half of pontoon boat, which could be used individually or two sections bolted together end-to-end. The pontoon boats were nicknamed Blechpantoffeln (sheet metal slippers).

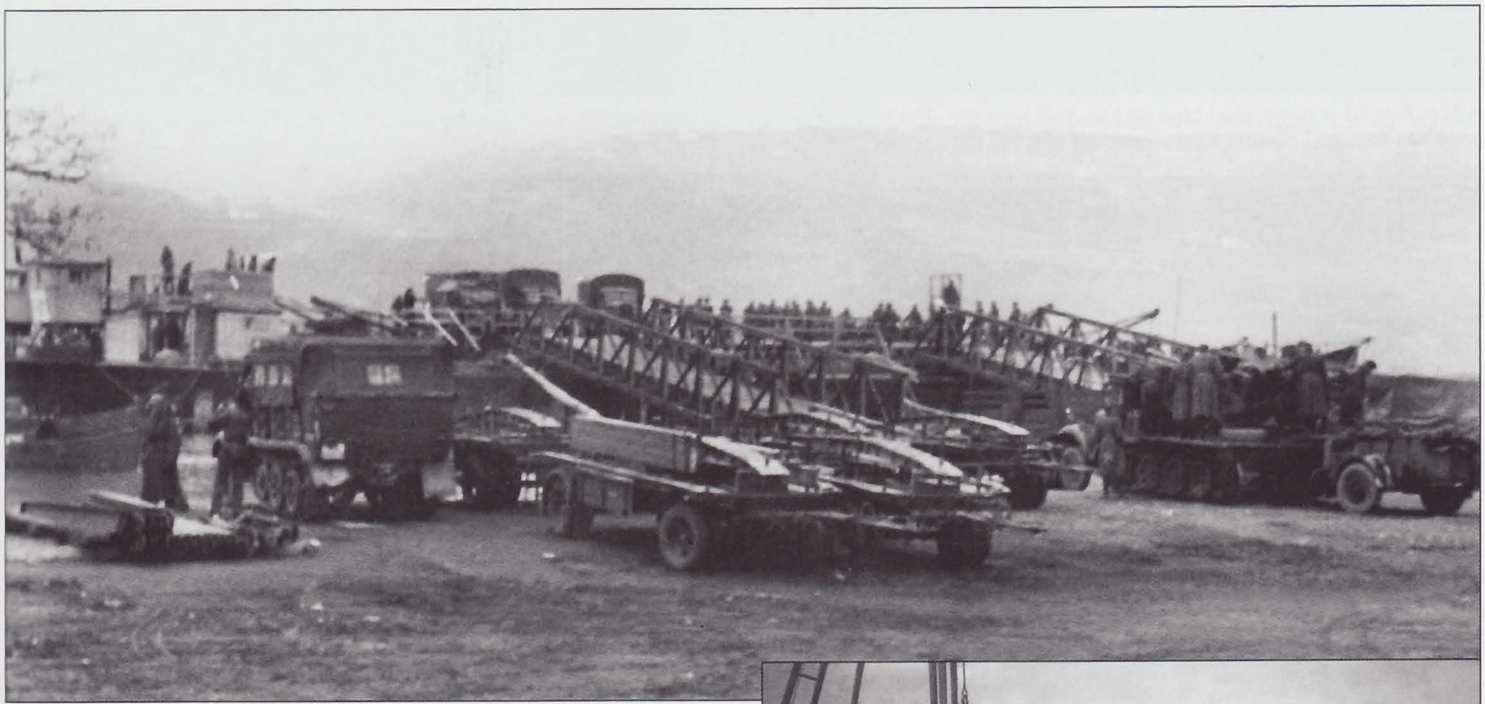
A light moment among a 2cm Flak crew. The light automatic guns were used as much against ground targets and aircraft.



The diversity of uniforms worn in the field is demonstrated here, from left to right: SS-Scharführer, SS-Sturmbannführer, and SS-Oberscharführer.

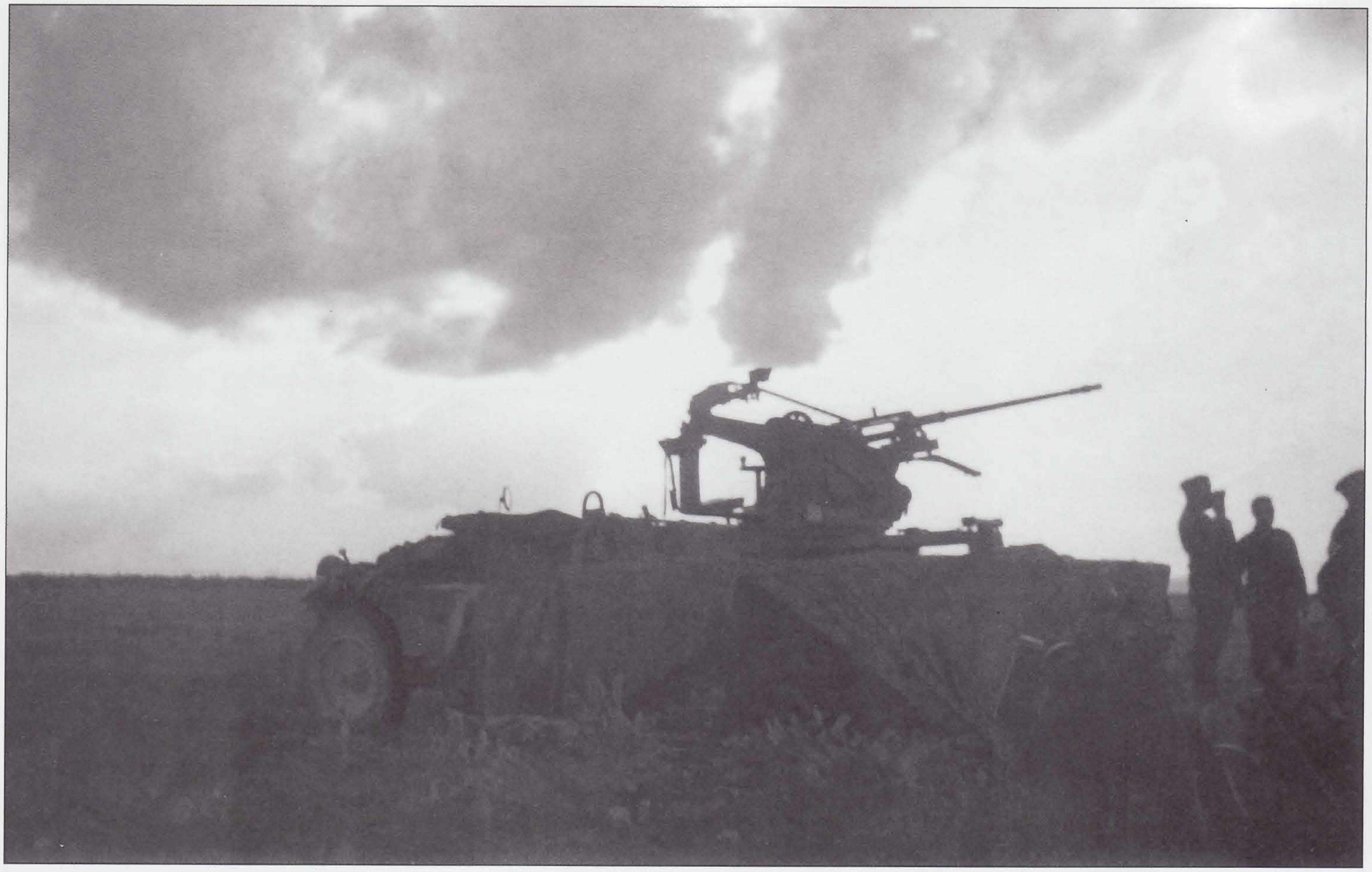


A limbered, canvas-covered 15cm K18 heavy gun is towed by a 12-ton Sd.Kfz. 8 halftrack prime-mover. A steep boarding ramp is required to load his equipment aboard a canal ferry. To the left is a widely used Ford cargo truck built in Germany.

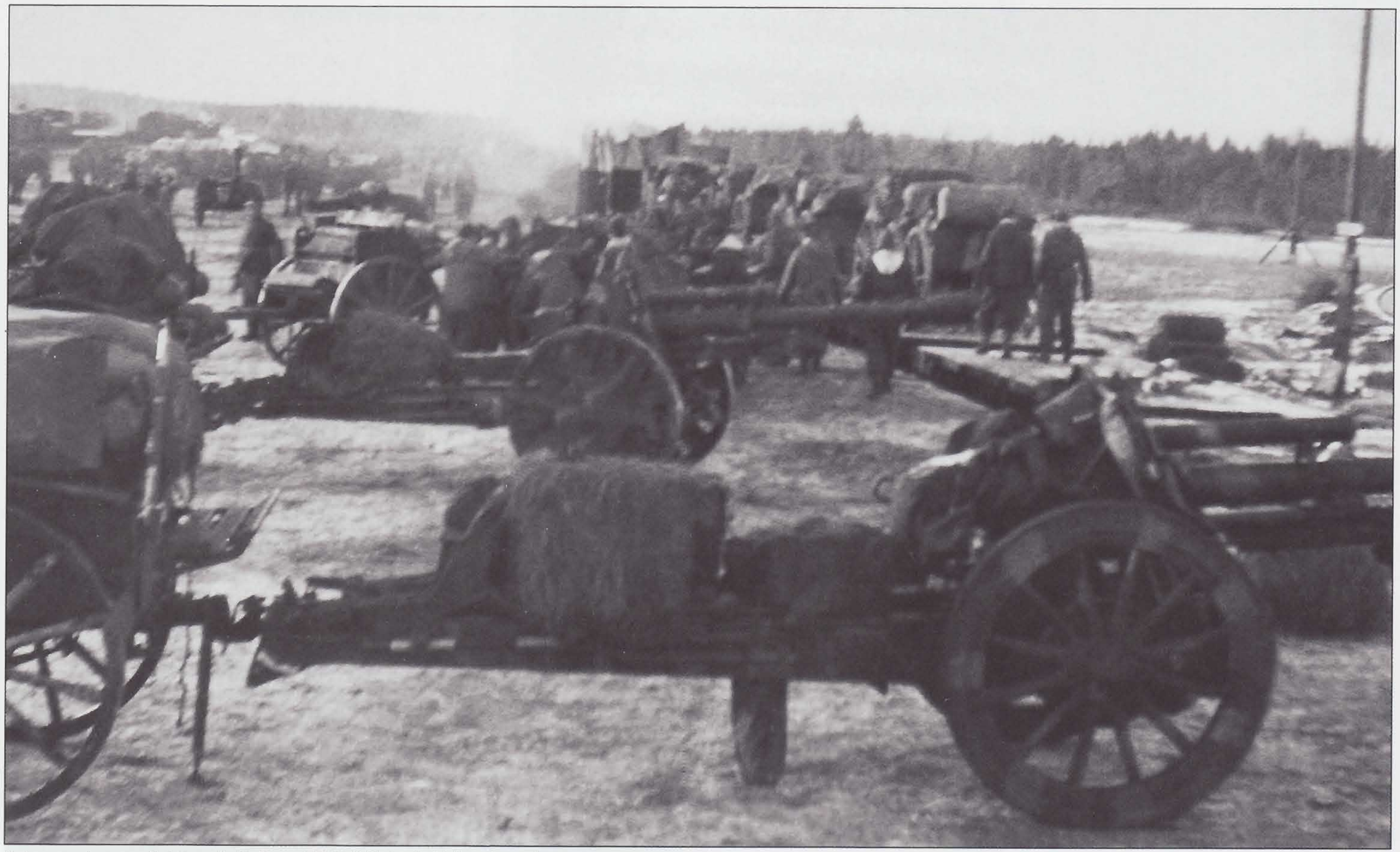


Pf 10 Bockwagen, which carry beams, decking, and ramps from which to construct pontoon bridges and ferries, are parked beside a river ferry landing.

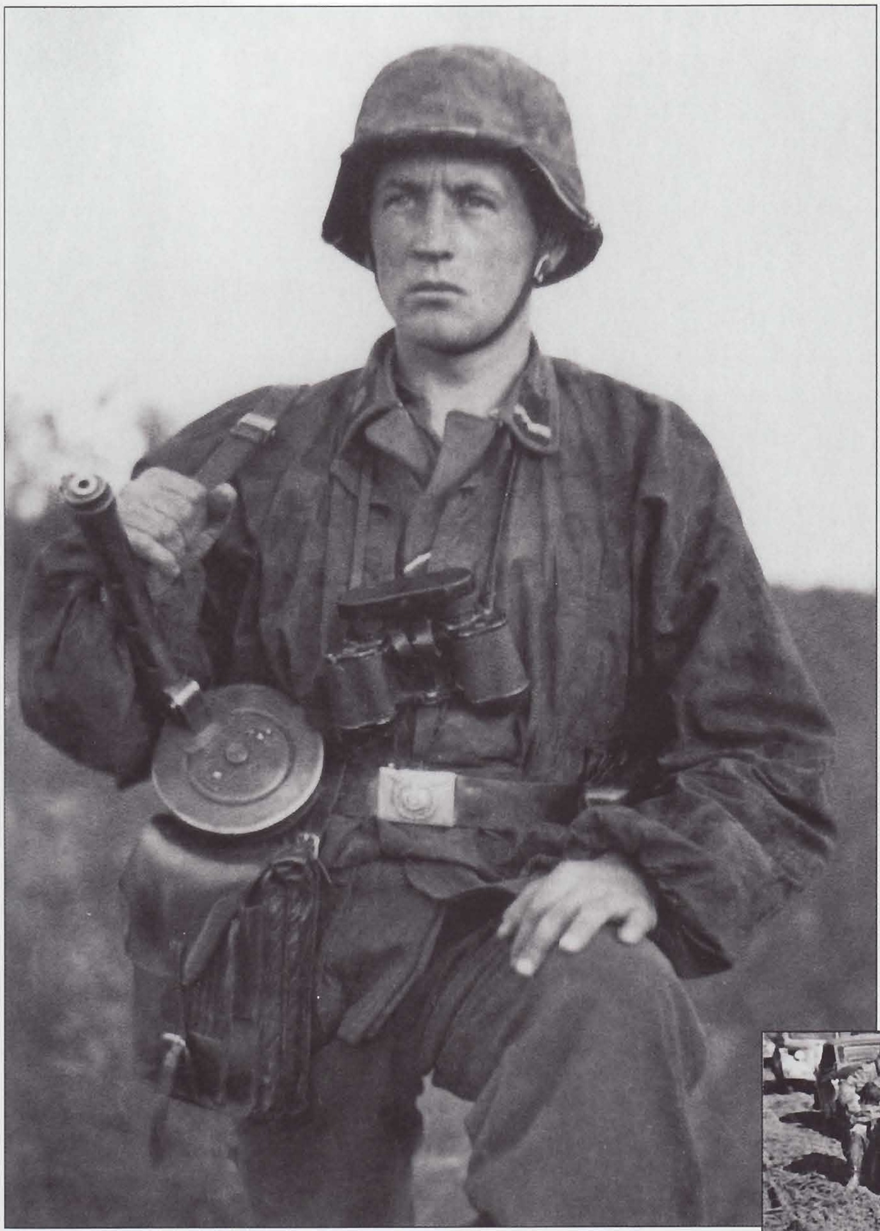
A light cross-country car passes over a pioneer-constructed timber bridge. On the pontoon boat ferry to the left can be seen the pile-driver used to build the bridge. The group of pioneers on the bridge wears white denim work uniforms.



A 2cm Flak 38 gun mounted on a Sd.Kfz. 10/5 halftrack. The sides of the gun compartment have been lower to provide a large operating platform and the crew has erected Zeltbahn shelter-quarters secured the vehicle's sides as sleeping shelters.

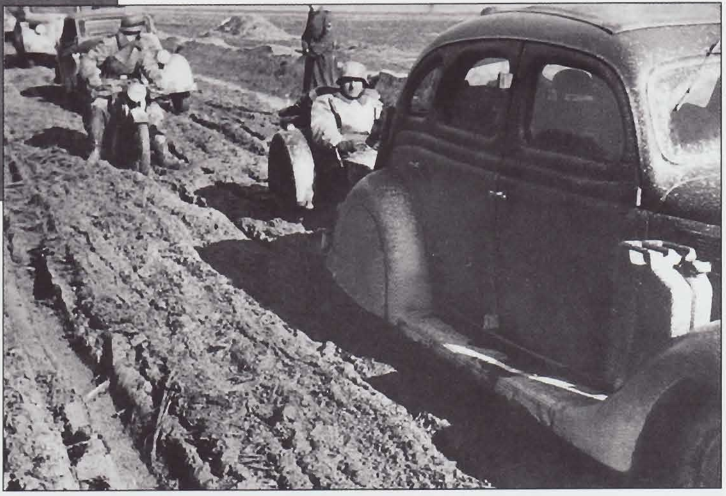


A horse-drawn divisional 10.5cm l.FH18 light field howitzer battery prepares to load-up its guns and equipment on to railroad flatcars. Note the bails of hay on the gun trails. A four-gun battery such as this had just over 100 draft and riding horses.



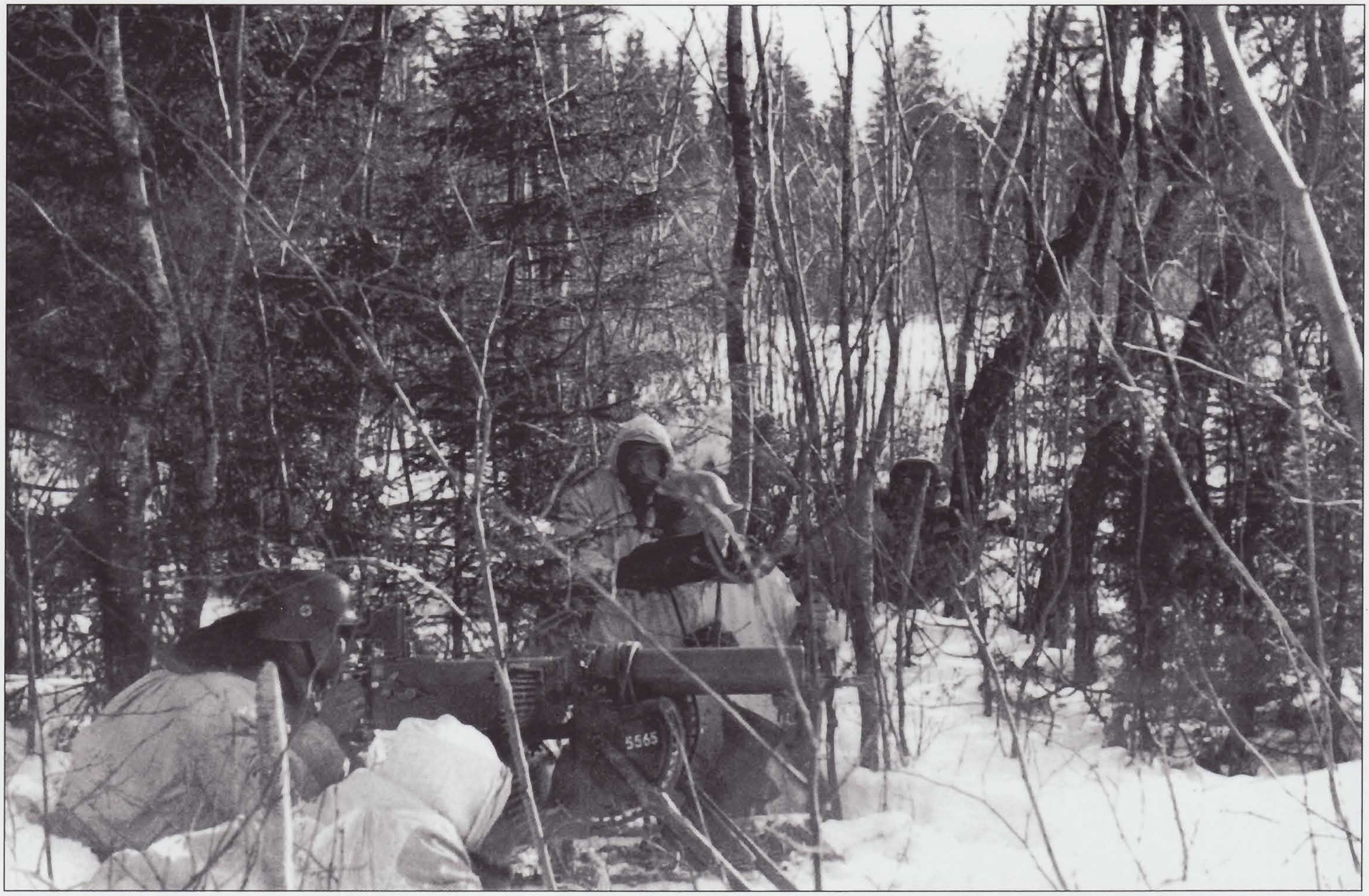
This SS-Rottenführer is armed with a Soviet 7.62mm Shpagin PPSh-41 machine pistol, what the Germans called an MP717(r). It is often assumed; owing to the frequency this weapon appears in the hands of German troops in photographs that they preferred it to their own 9mm MP40. The MP40 was unquestionably a better weapon. The PPSh-41 was used simply to increase short-range automatic firepower or to supplement their own shortages of MP40s. The weapons were available and useful for combat patrols and forest and house-to-house fighting. He is also armed with a pistol and a leather report/map case 35 (Meldekartentasche 35) is attached to his belt.

A valuable find is recovered from an abandoned Soviet bunker, a 7.62mm Tokarev M1940 self-loading rifle. The Germans designated it the Selbstladegewehr 259(r). They were much prized as the semiautomatic rifle with a 10-round magazine provided the firepower of two bolt-action rifles. While the Torkarev was not the most robust and reliable of semi-automatic rifles, it was considered more reliable than its German counterpart, the little used 7.9mm Walther Gew41(W) rifle.



A combination motorcycle of Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" takes a tow from a staff car during the autumn mud. When the winter freeze came the ruts and ridges of frozen mud made some roads even more difficult to traverse by light vehicles until heavier traffic ground them down or they were covered with hard-packed frozen snow. Motorcycles, while valuable in the more agreeable terrain and weather conditions of Western Europe, were next to useless in the Russian mud and winter. They stuck in the mud, buried themselves in soft snow, and in the extreme cold were impossible to start. Motorcycle reconnaissance units converted to skis in the winter.

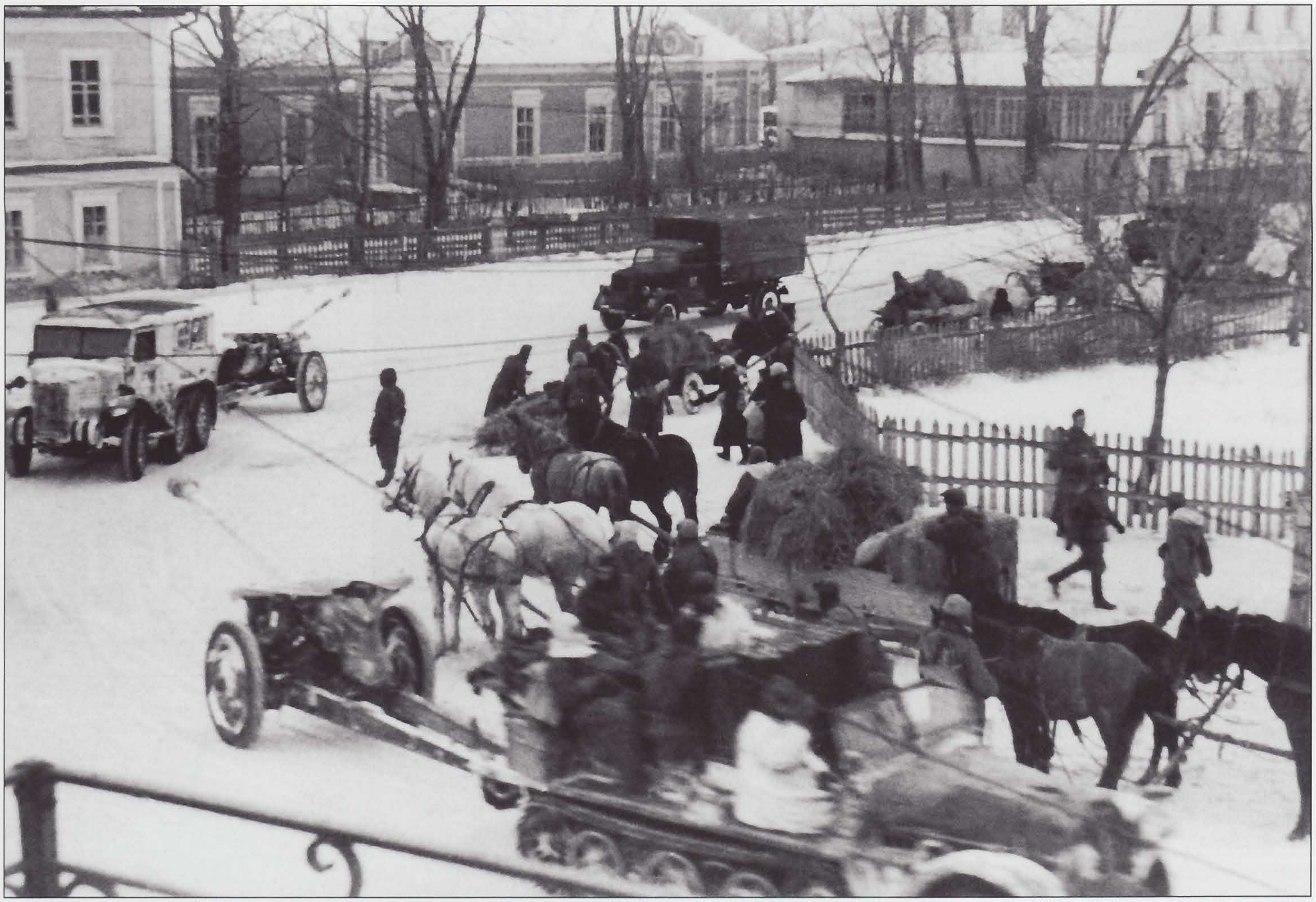
An SS-Scharführer supervises a delousing station. Note that the soldier to the left wears a gasmask to protect him from the disinfectant powder. Soldiers are said to have fought three wars on the Eastern Front: against the Red Army, the brutal climate, and the louse. The never ending battle against Kleiderpartisanen (clothes partisans) went on year around. It was said that the two worst things about Russia were Läuse und Scharfschützen (lice and snipers).



Many early Waffen-SS battalion machine gun companies (4th, 8th, and 12th companies of an infantry regiment) were provided 7.9mm MG08 water-cooled heavy machine guns, often referred to as Spandaus. This was in lieu of the modern 7.9mm MG34 machine gun in the heavy machine gun role. The company had three four-machine gun platoons to provide supporting fire. The guns generally operated in pairs, setup 10 or more meters apart depending on the terrain. They covered the same target area alternating their fire to keep up a continuous rain of death.

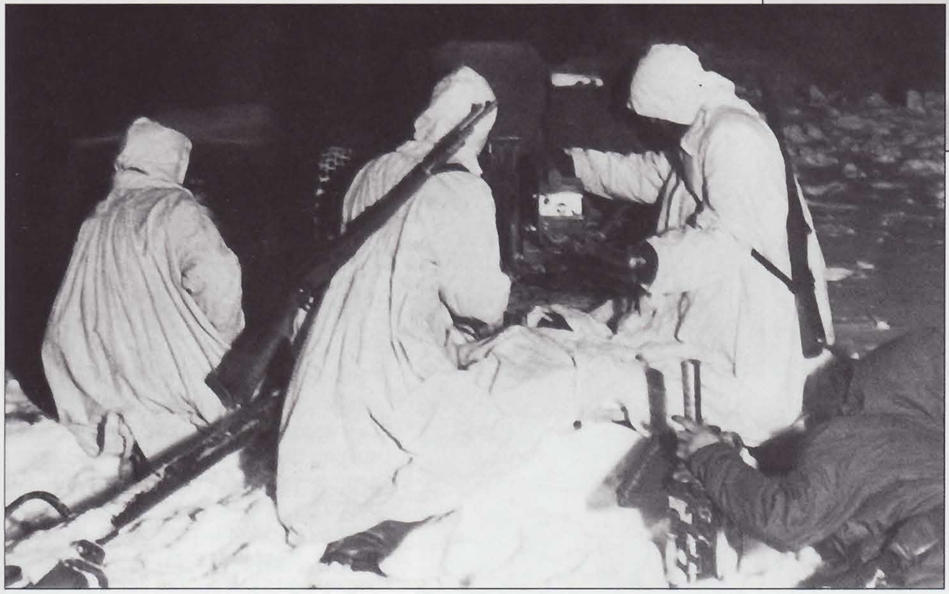
"Wiking" Division troops are passed by a tank unit on its way to the front. On the steppes it was common for tanks and other vehicles to use an ever widening road as foot troops marched on a parallel route.

Two soldiers urgently check a wounded comrade during a blizzard. Besides dedicated medics, some troops received additional first aid training. Each soldier carried two field dressing packets (Verbandspäckchen) in inside pockets in their tunic's lower right skirt. The dressings were of two different sizes, the smaller for the entry wound and the larger for the exit wound or to use on two different fragmentation wounds. Unfolded the larger dressing was 7x11cm and the smaller 5x8.5cm; both were 2cm thick.

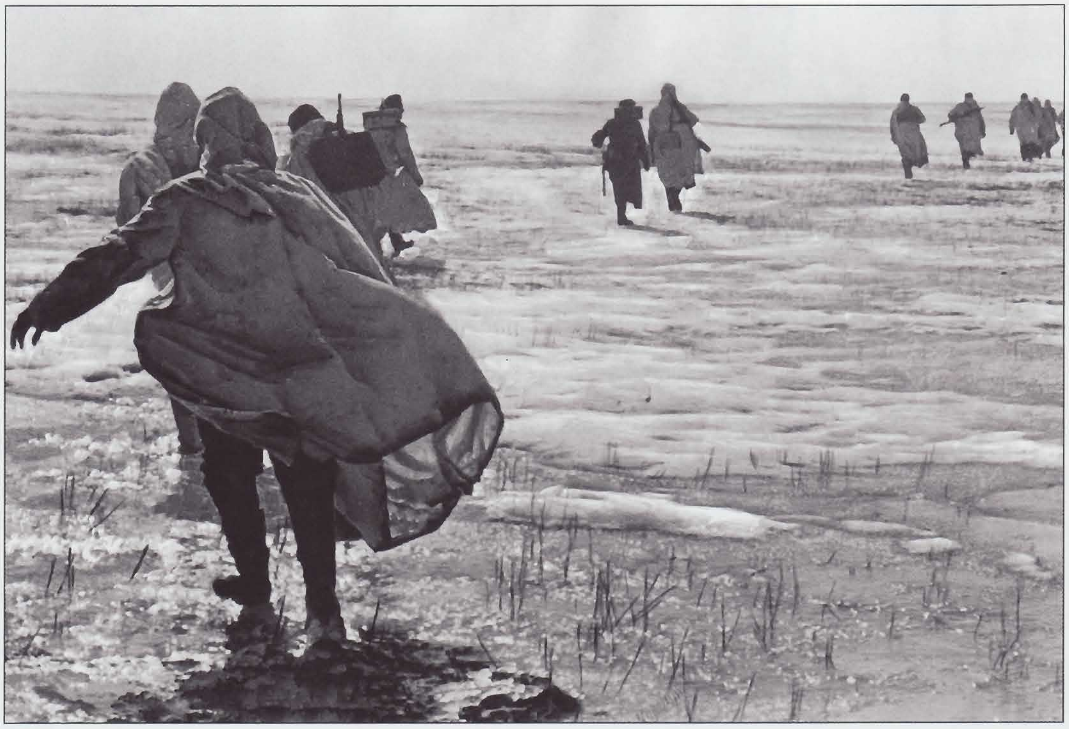


This scene demonstrates the disorganization and chaos in the German transportation and logistics capabilities. An antitank unit equipped with Soviet 7.62cm Pak 36(r) guns, formerly 76.2mm M1936 F-22 field guns, passes through a city. No two vehicles shown here are the same and a shoddy assortment of sleds, wagons, and carts can be seen.

Assault troops occupy an abandoned Soviet strongpoint. Barber wire entanglements line both sides of the trench. To the left rear a solider checks the entrance to a bunker. Besides clearing the position of the enemy, recovered weapons, ammunition and equipment, one of the next priorities was to find any food left behind.

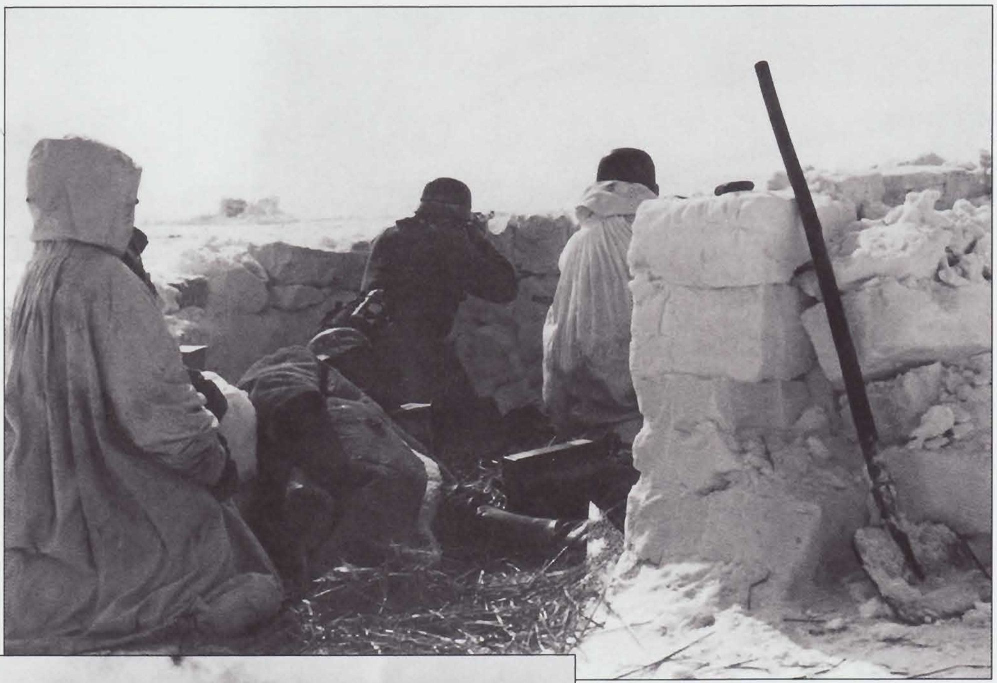


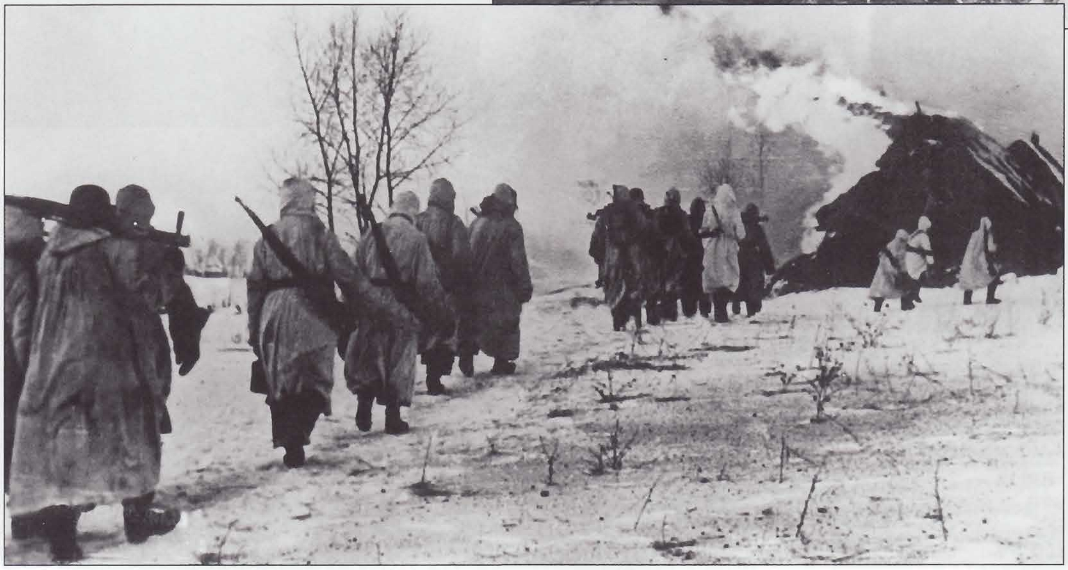
A Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" antitank gun crew prepares to fire its 3.7cm Pak 35/36. The breechblocks of any kind of gun or artillery piece had to be protected from the cold and ice forming on it or it would be impossible to open.



A Waffen-SS patrol struggles across a barren steppe whipped by the wind. A reconnaissance patrol was called a "front stroll" (Frontbummel). The wind-chill factor greatly lowered the already brutally cold air temperature and prolonged exposure to the icy blast could cause frostbite. The interval between individuals would widen as the patrol neared Russian lines.

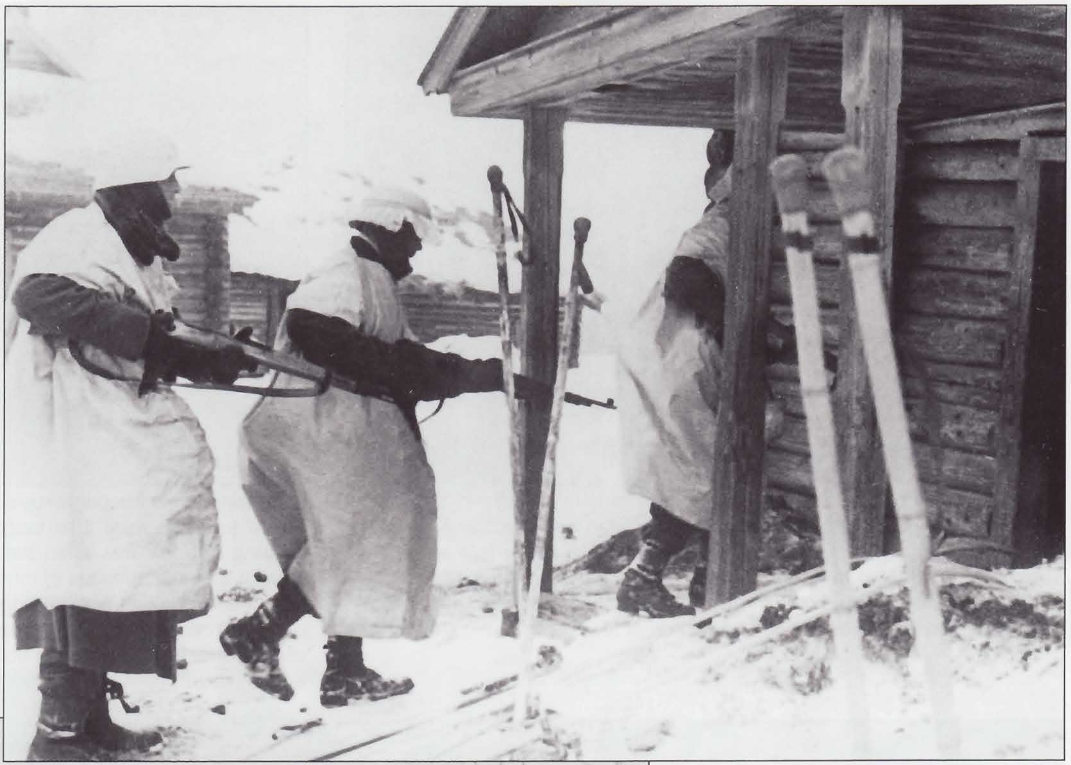
This Waffen-SS observation post was constructed of a double layer of snow blocks. These could stop rifle and machine gun fire, and even large shell fragments. Straw insulated the ground from the cold. A commandeered Russian shovel aided in this position's construction. Requisitioned hand tools were valued prizes.

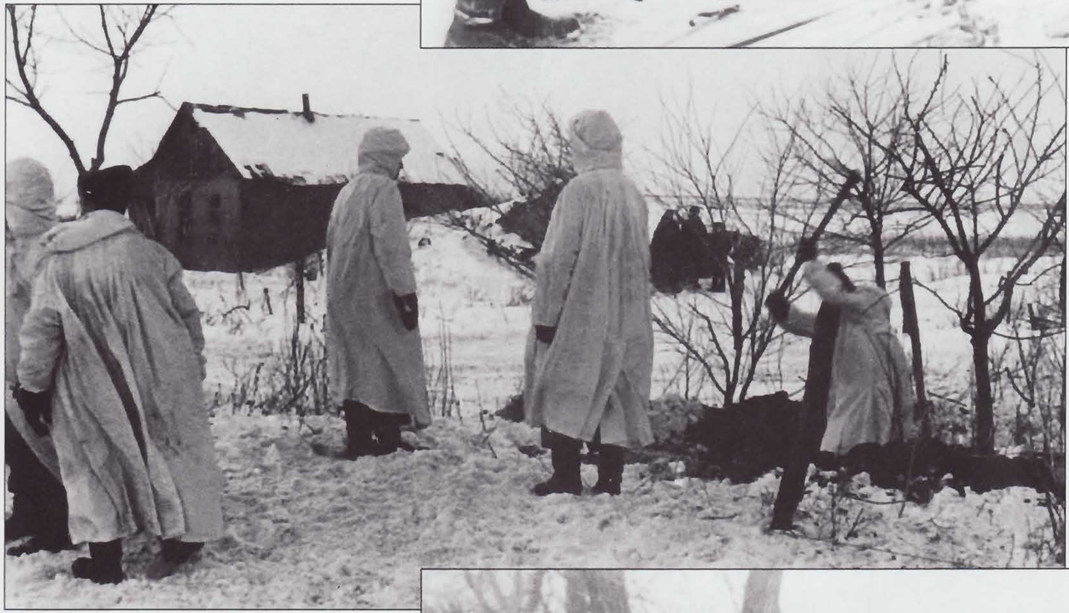




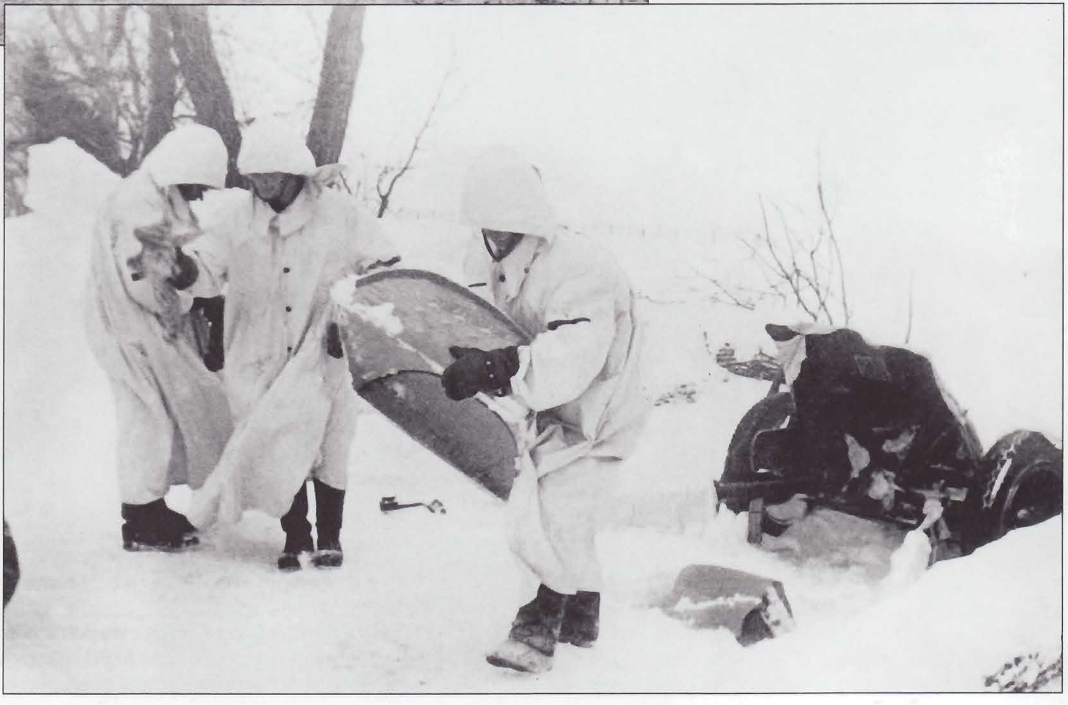
"Totenkopf" Division troops file into a village that the Russians have fired. The scorched earth policy was to leave nothing behind that the Germans could use. It was especially important that buildings be burned to deny the Hitlerites (Gitlerit; no "H" in Russian) shelter. It appears that the lead men are beginning to put out the flames.

While appearing to be prepared for an occupancy dispute, these Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" troops are actually entering a secure cabin. Note the German ski poles stuck in the snow in the foreground and skis lying on the ground.





The shelter offered by log cabins and any other available buildings was critical to survival. However, fighting positions, such as those being dug here by Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" troops, were dug away from the buildings as they attracted artillery and mortar fire.



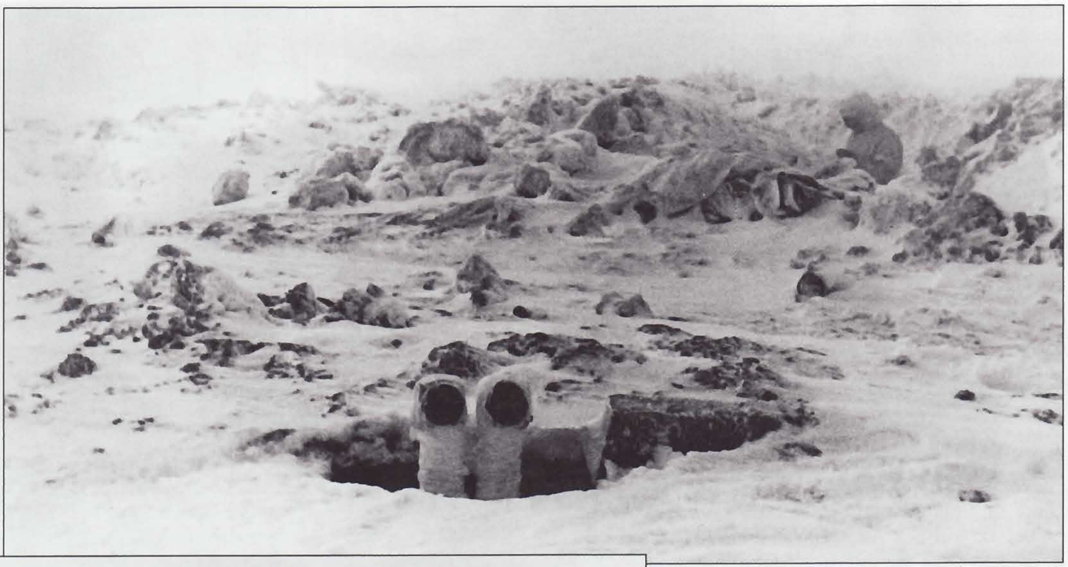
The crew of a Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" 3.7cm Pak 35/36 antitank gun checks their weapons after a snow storm. The wooden assembly held by the man in the center appears to be a cover to protect the breech. White sheeting covers the gunshield and front of the tires.

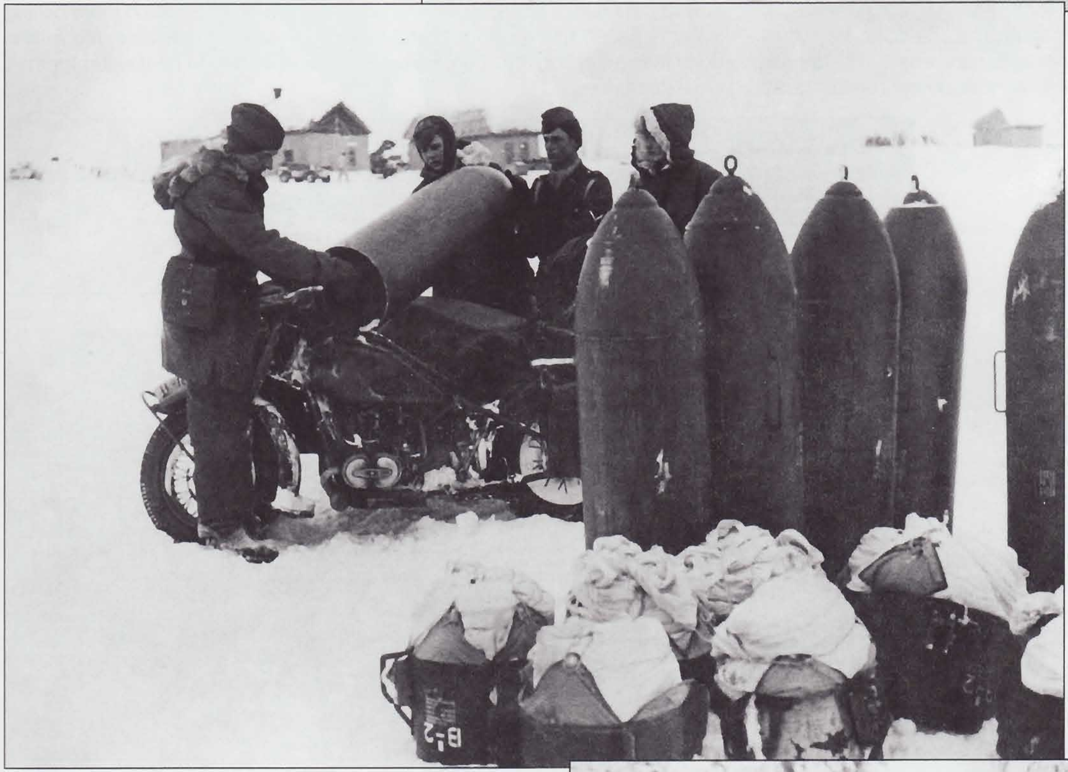
A Waffen-SS scout pauses during a patrol with two German Shepherds (deutsche Schäferhunde). Scout dogs would alert on detecting any hidden enemy soldiers and helped prevent patrols from walking into ambushes. They were invaluable in preventing ambushes. They were just as valuable for their companionship, providing warmth in a shared dugout. In desperate circumstances they even provided a source of food.

A Waffen-SS ski trooper takes aim with his carbine after discarding his skis. These troopers were also taught to assume the prone position while still wearing skis. As was often the case, his carbine is whitewashed. The ski poles and upper surfaces of the skis themselves are painted white. The dark brown bottom sides and the edges of the skis were unpainted to allow them to be waxed. Sometimes a green stripe was painted down the center of the upper surface forward of the boot bindings. His field cap is camouflaged by a white cover made of stretchable fabric.

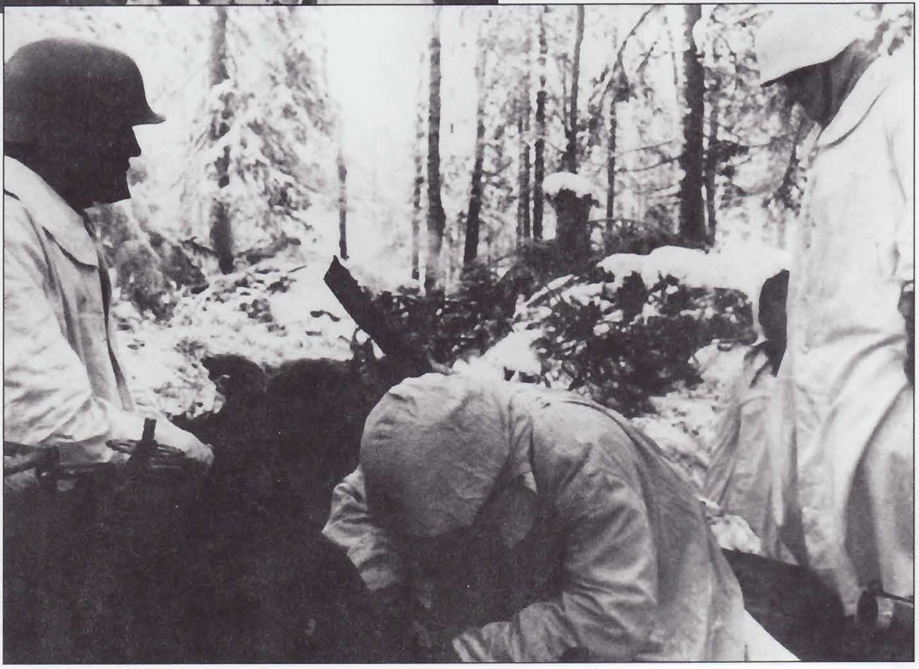
The Waffen-SS crew of this 8cm s.Gr.W.34 heavy mortar conducts a fire mission in support of the infantry. While their position is frosty, at least it is out of the wind. The mortar wears a coat of whitewash paint, which quickly wore off in places with use. The high-explosive mortar rounds were carried three to an air-tight metal case. The rounds were maroon-painted and dark green, which the Germans called 'field gray'.

Wrapped in white cloth, the double periscopes of a 6x30 Sf.14Z Scherenfernrohr (scissors binoculars) peek from a well concealed artillery observation post. Soldiers called the binoculars "Eselsohren" (donkey ears). Among the chunks of snow to the right rear can be seen a soldier emerging from the dugout's exit tunnel.

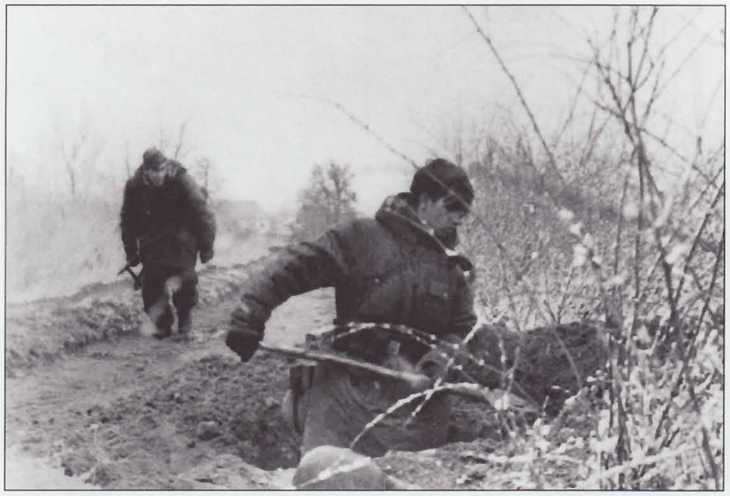




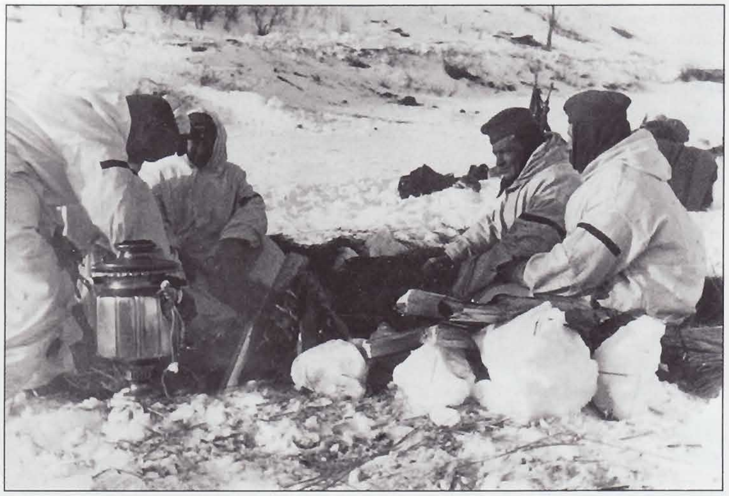
The Luftwaffe used these parachute-dropped, supply bombs (Versorgungsbomben) to deliver ammunition, rations, and medical supplies to ground troops. Here Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" troops collect the emptied containers. These airdrop containers (Abwurfkisten) could be reused, even the second from the right with its slightly damaged nose.



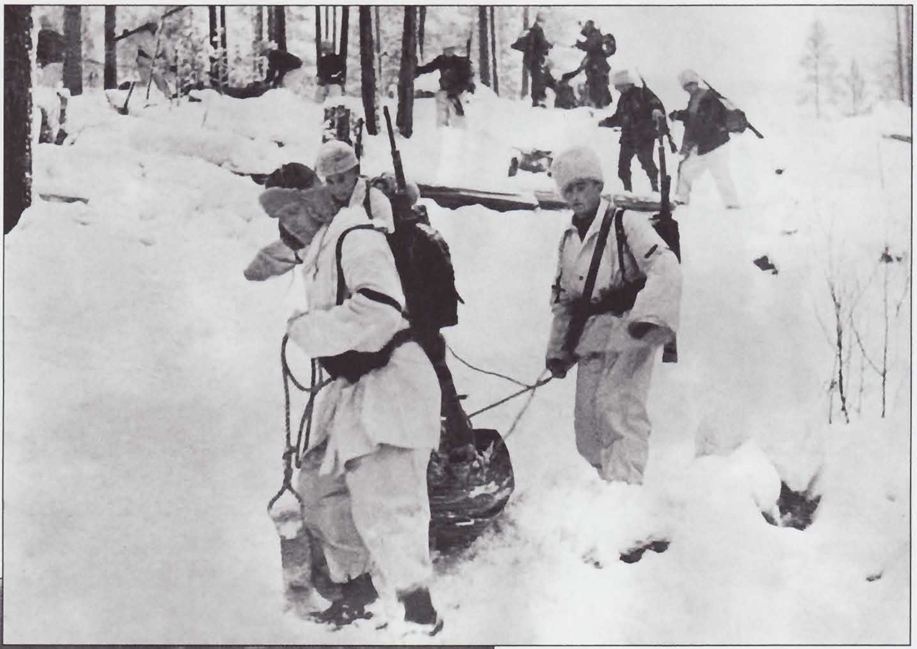
Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" troops prepare for a combat patrol (Gefechtsspähtrupp). Typical steel helmet coverings are displayed: from left to right, a bare helmet still painted dark field gray, white cloth cover, and whitewashed.



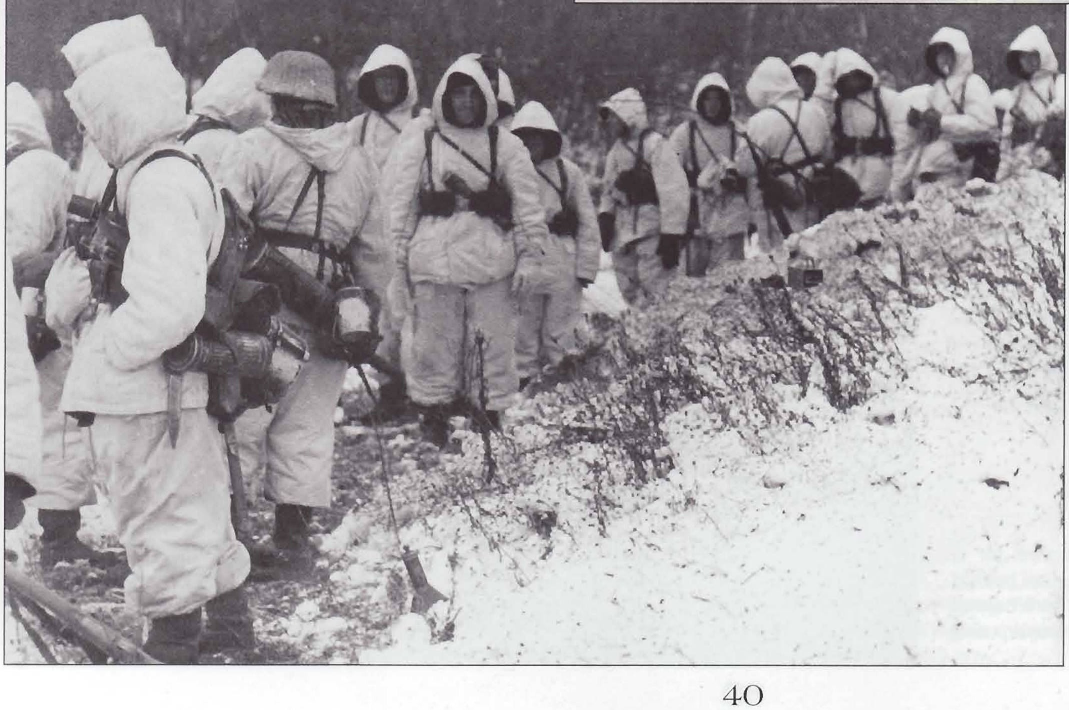
Clad in their Waffen-SS insulated suits with the field gray side out, Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" troops dig in along a country road. This was a difficult task in the frozen ground and the standard issue individual entrenching tool was next to useless. Regardless of the cold, this work warmed one up and he has discarded his helmet. There was a real danger of sweat freezing though to cause frostbite and lower one's body temperature.



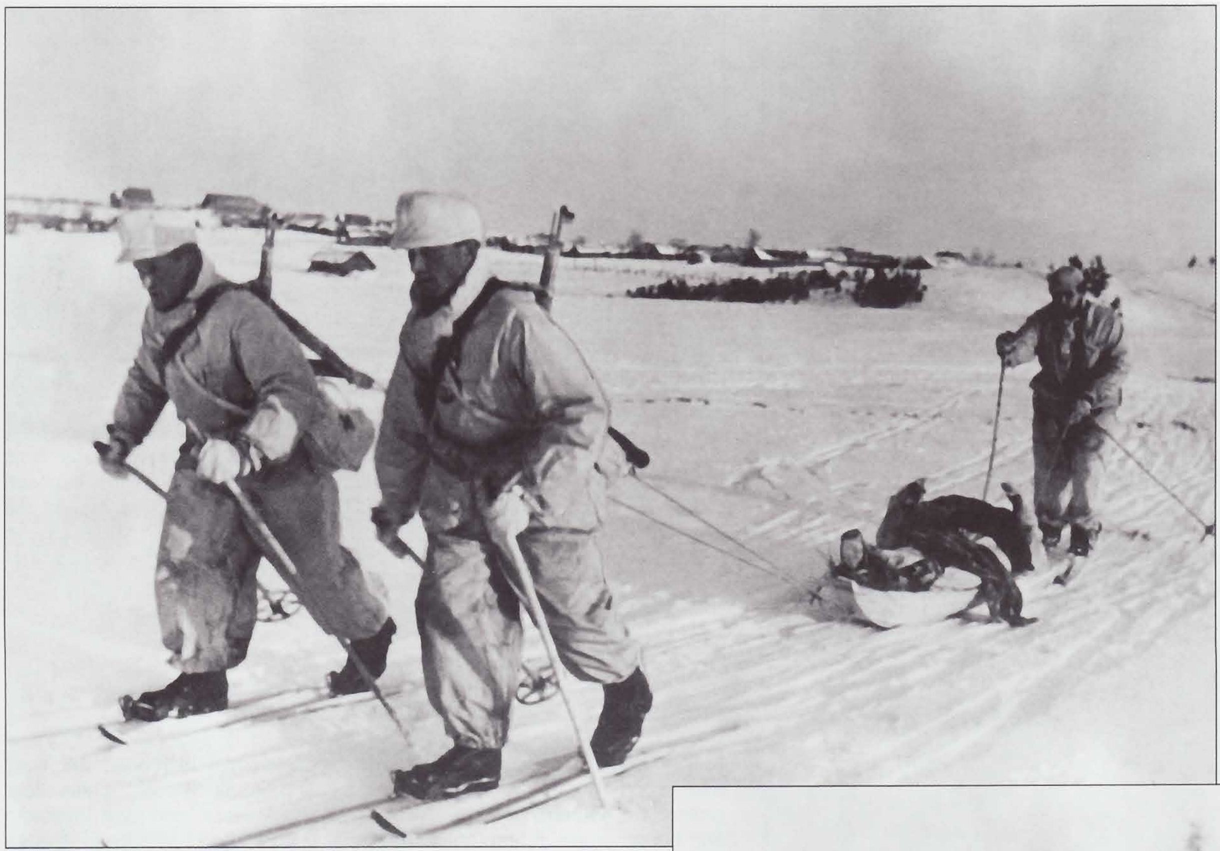
Troops of 3.SS-Panzer-Division "Totenkopf" brew up tea during a rest halt with the aid of a liberated samovar. Russian tea is brewed in a small amount of water to make a concentrate and poured into a glass to which more boiling water is added along with a liberal helping of sugar, if available. More than likely they are using the charcoal-fired samovar merely to heat water for their ersatz coffee.



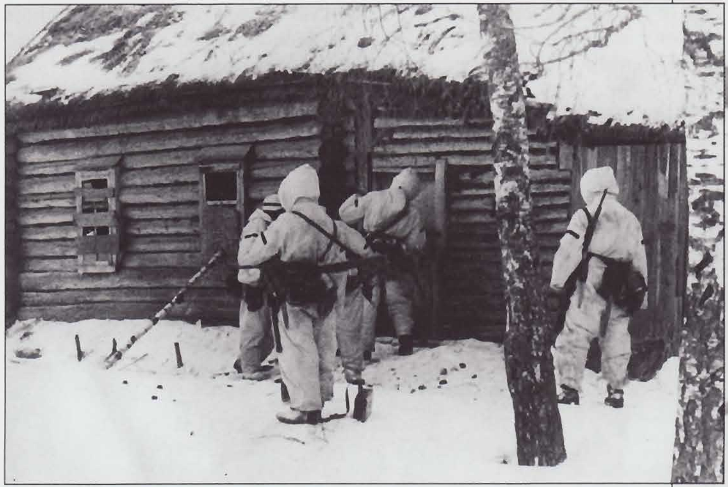
Troops of the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" work their way down a ridge side littered with fallen trees and limbs. This has forced them to remove and carry their skis. The three men in the foreground are bringing down a small sled with the brakeman following.



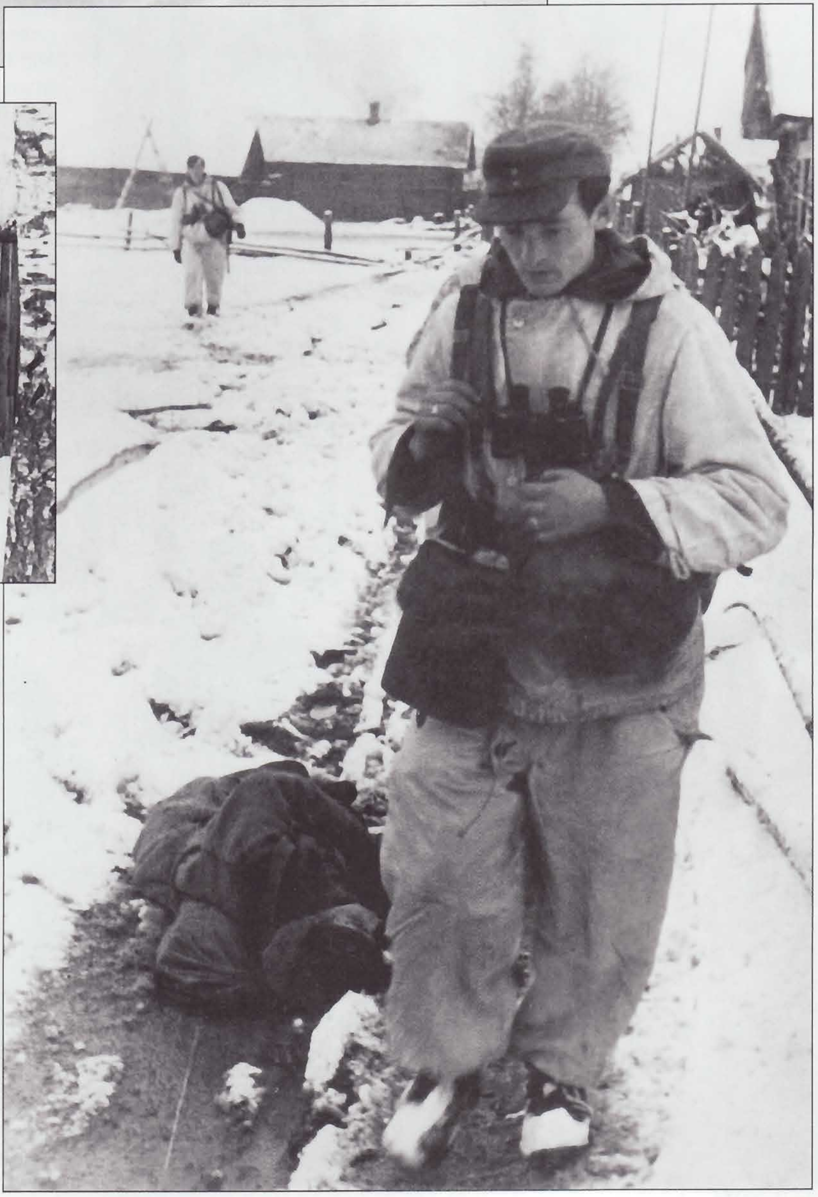
A "Totenkopf" Division company lines up on a road to move up to forward positions. They will probably replace a company that has been in the line for only a couple of days. Companies were rotated to the battalion and regimental reserve frequently in order to reduce frostbite casualties. Frostbite was often responsible for taking more men out of action than enemy fire. On the ground in the lower left can be seen the handle of a 3-kilogram magnetic hollow-charge (Haft-Hohlladungen 3-kg), a hand-delivered antitank mine.



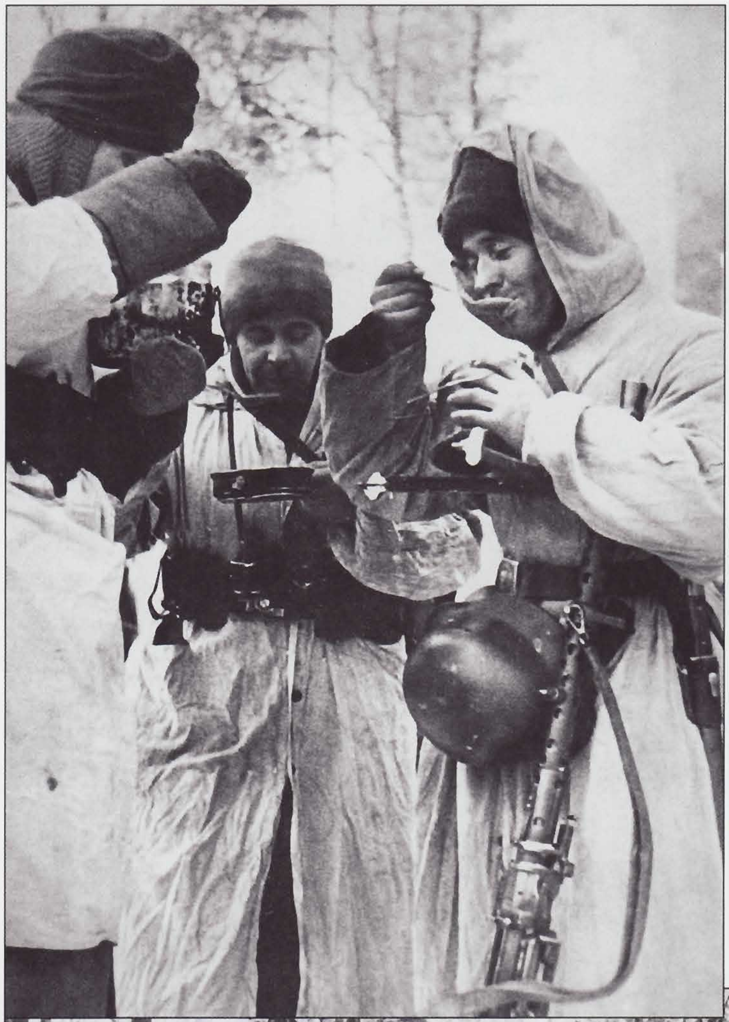
A Waffen-SS recovery detail returns bearing the body of a fallen comrade aboard a Bootskaya. Cross-country skiing, as opposed to alpine and downhill skiing, is relatively easy to teach and can be learned in a week. The key is physical stamina in order to maintain the necessary endurance. A Bootskaya (boat-sled) was about two-meters long and was used to carry equipment, supplies, or casualties. They might be towed by two men on foot or skis, or by a horse. A third man followed attached to the stern of the Bootskaya by a rope. He served as the brakeman. This applied even when the sled was towed by a horse.



Leibstandarte-SS "Adolf Hitler" troops prepare to enter a Russian log cabin. Cabins, though often lice-infested, were essential for surviving the night. The Germans called them by the Russian term "Isba". Typical construction was one to three rooms, a few windows, one or two doors, and thatch or shingle roof. There was no running water or indoor toilet.

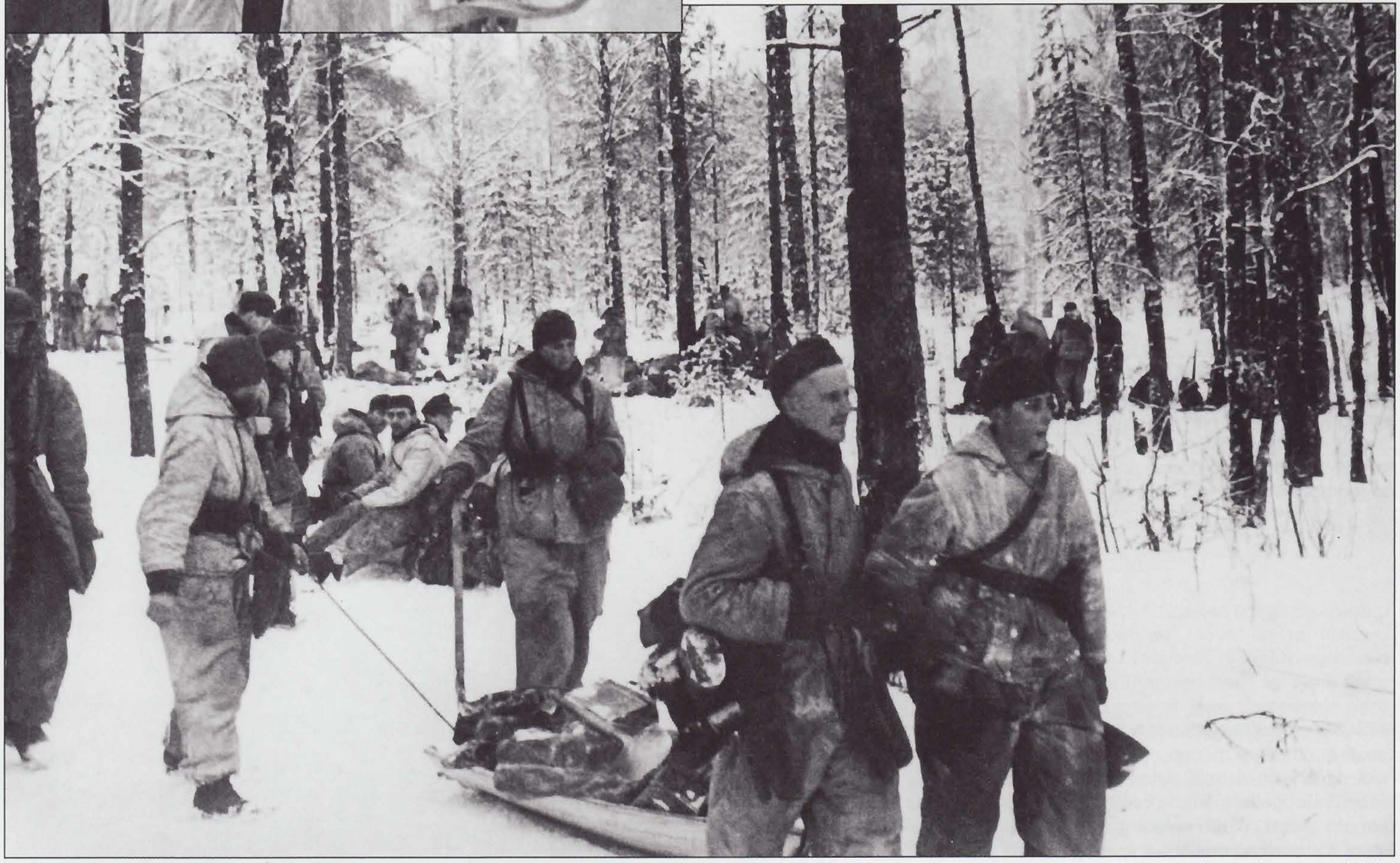


A Waffen-SS officer adjusts his equipment. On the front of his belt are a leather report/map case and his steel helmet. Around his neck is a pair of 6x30 universal binoculars, officially known as einheits Doppelfernrohr or Fernglas, and unofficially as Dienstglas (service glass). When entering a heated bunker or building it was better to leave binoculars and other optical devices outdoors, as condensation would form on them when exposed to a sudden temperature change. Likewise, when taking them outdoors they would fog up and any condensation would freeze.

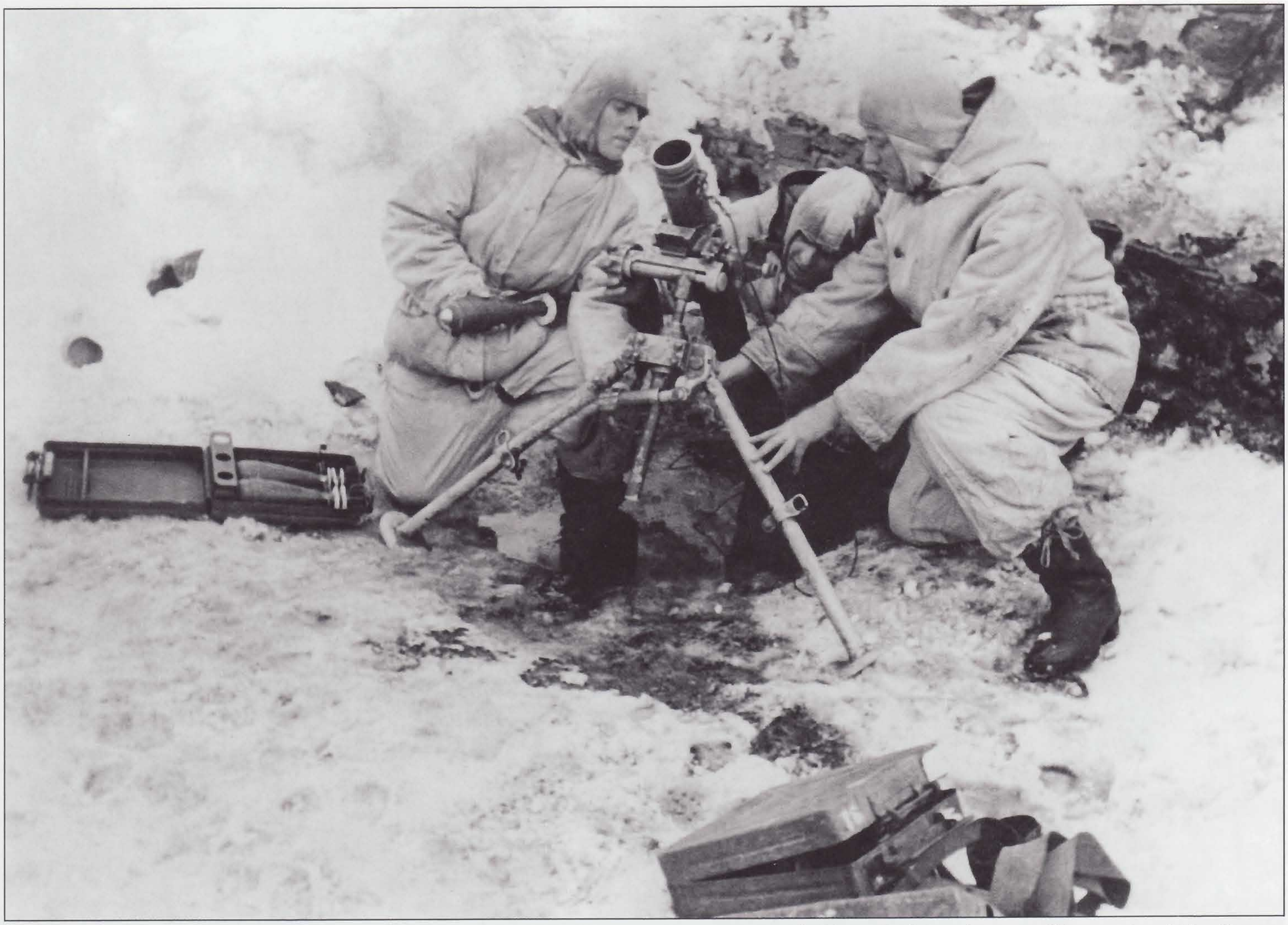


A 17mm motion picture cameraman of the propaganda company films Waffen-SS soldiers manning an observation post. Due to the exposed nature of this post, which lacks small observation ports, snipers do not appear to be a concern in this sector.

"Wiking" Division troops gratefully partake of hot soup at the noon meal. They wear woolen toques (Balaclava helmets). The Germans called these "ear protectors" (Ohrenschützen). Two were typically worn, one over the head and the other around the neck. Their main purpose was to provide warmth when wearing a steel helmet, which provided no insulation from the cold. The tops of ears would freeze to the inside of an unlined helmet. The machine gunner is armed with a 7.92mm MG34, sometimes called a "coffee-grinder" (Kaffeemühle).



"Totenkopf" Division troops advance through a forest pulling Bootskaya sleds. This scene demonstrates just how dirty the white uniforms became. While making them useless for snow camouflage, they actually provided a reasonable degree of camouflage in winter forests as they blended well into the shadows and the grayish bark of many trees.

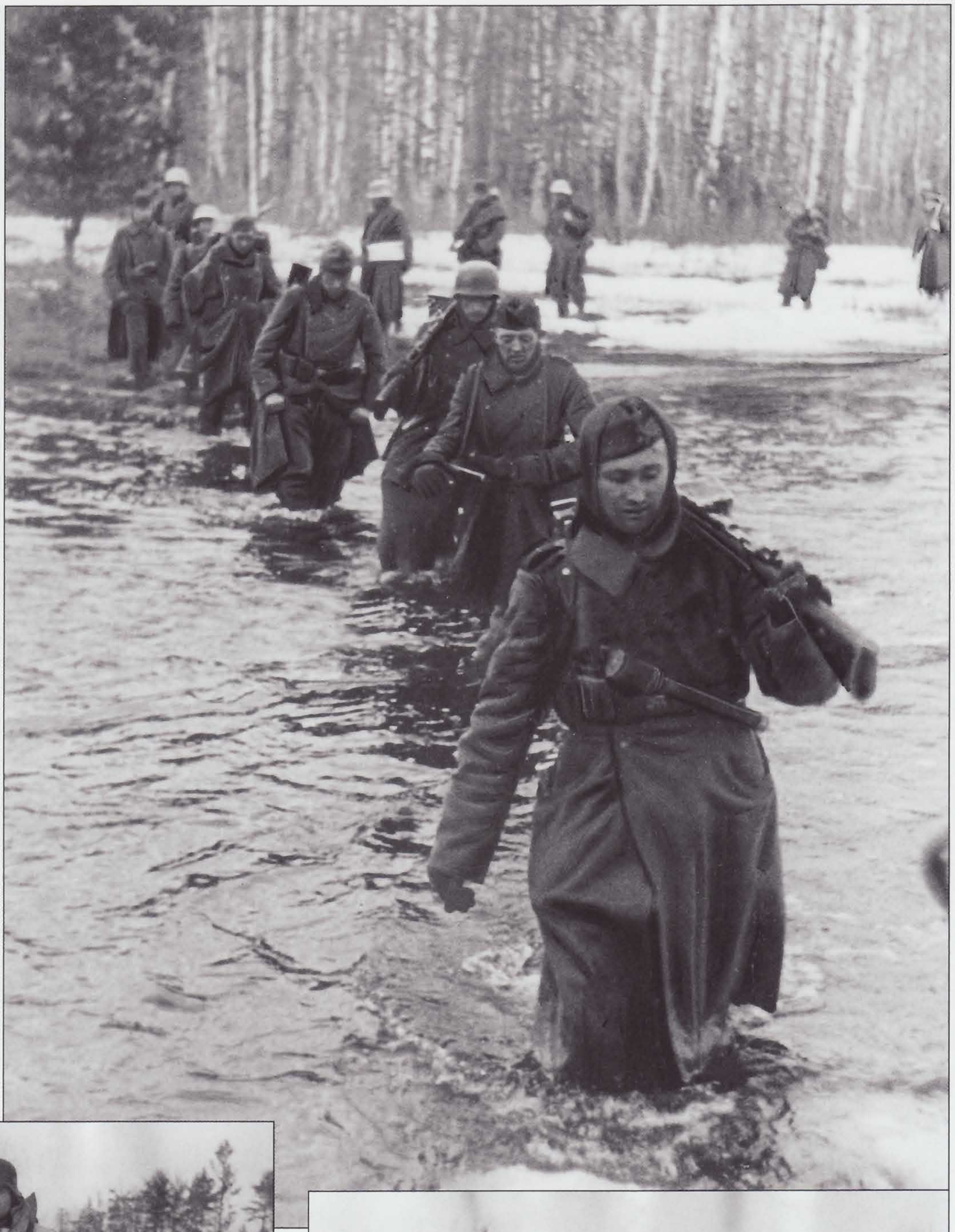


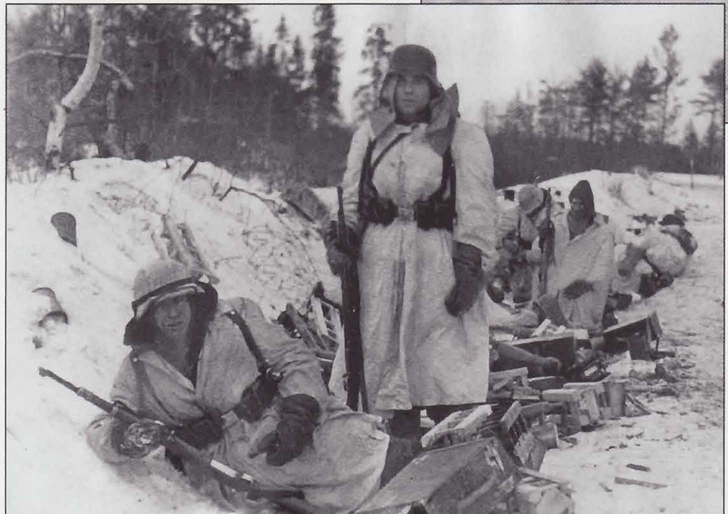
A "Wiking" Division 8cm mortar crew prepares for action. The caliber of the 8cm mortar was actually 81mm. Soviet mortars were 82mm and could fire German ammunition, but not vice versa. The Germans did commonly use captured Soviet mortars and ammunition. The 8cm mortar was originally classified as a heavy (schwer) mortar but in 1943 it was reclassified as a medium (mittleres) mortar with the introduction of the 12cm s.Gr.W.43, a copy of the Soviet 120mm HM-38 mortar. The 8cm was now known as the m.Gr.W.34.

A three-passenger civilian sled commandeered by the "Wiking" Division. A coat of whitewash has been applied over its previously garish colors. Any and all means of transport enabling better over-the-snow movement were

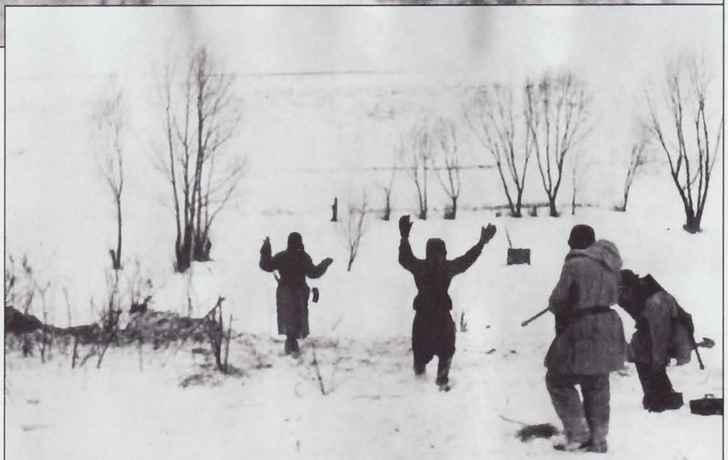
Two riflemen of 2.SS.-Panzer-Division "Das Reich" rush past a burning T-34/76. This was not a good place to be, as an internal ammunition detonation or the burst of the external auxiliary fuel tanks seen over the rear fenders would not provide a welcome warmth.

A "Wiking" Division rifle company crosses a swollen stream; a chilly proposition. "Rasputitza" also described the spring mud. While there was indeed rain, most of the mud was caused by the thaw, which could turn small streams into rushing rivers overflowing their banks.

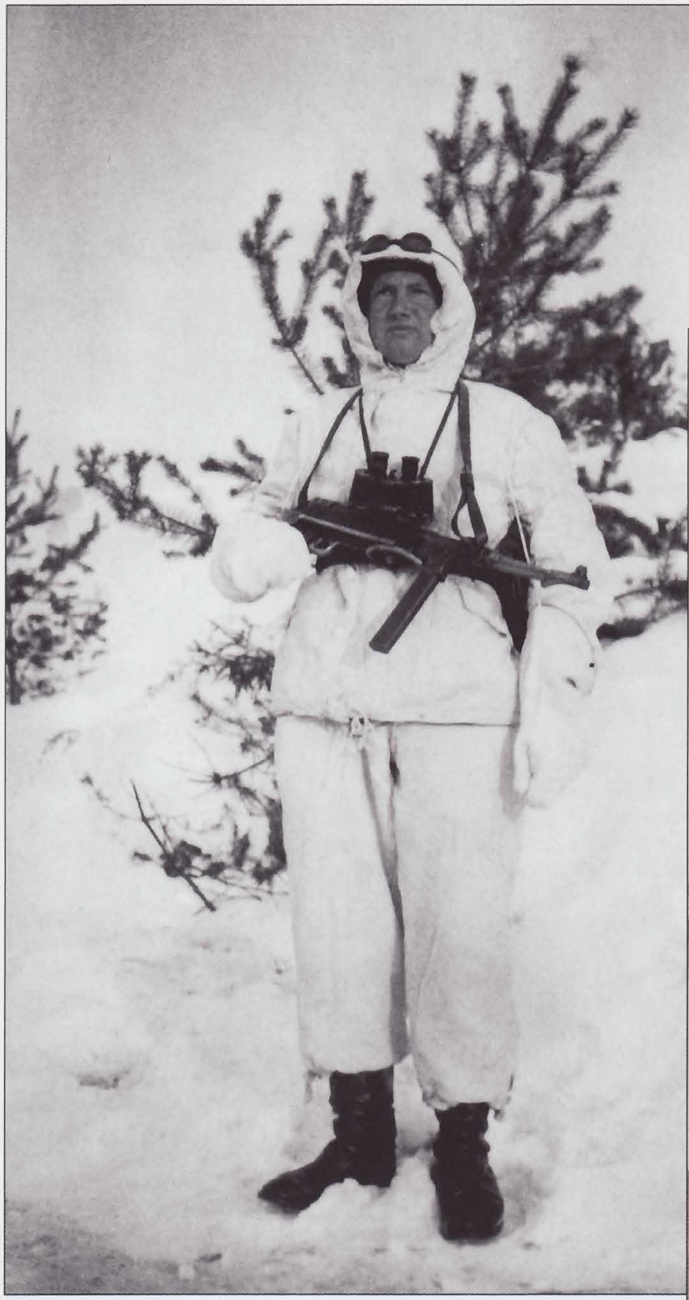




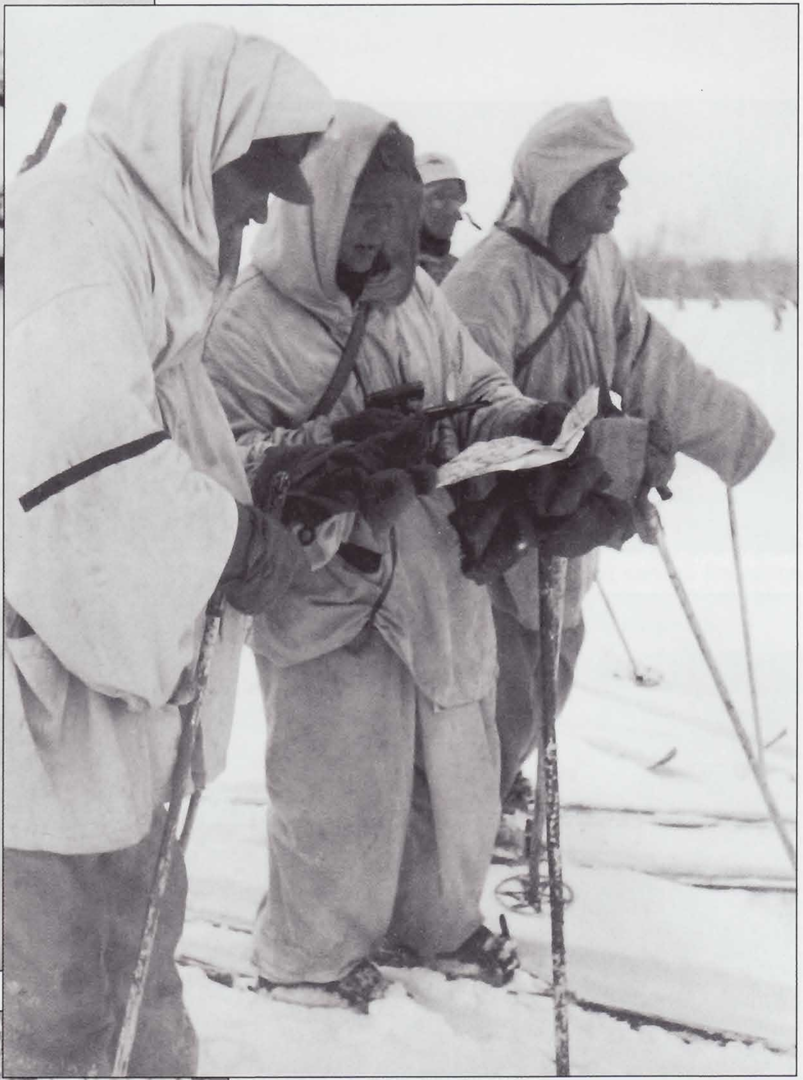
"Wiking" Division troops scrounging though battlefield wreckage for anything of value. Such severe shortages were experienced on the Eastern Front that soldiers were constantly on the lookout for anything of use among battlefield debris, their own and the enemy's and from civilian sources. The shell casings are from German 7.5cm infantry guns.



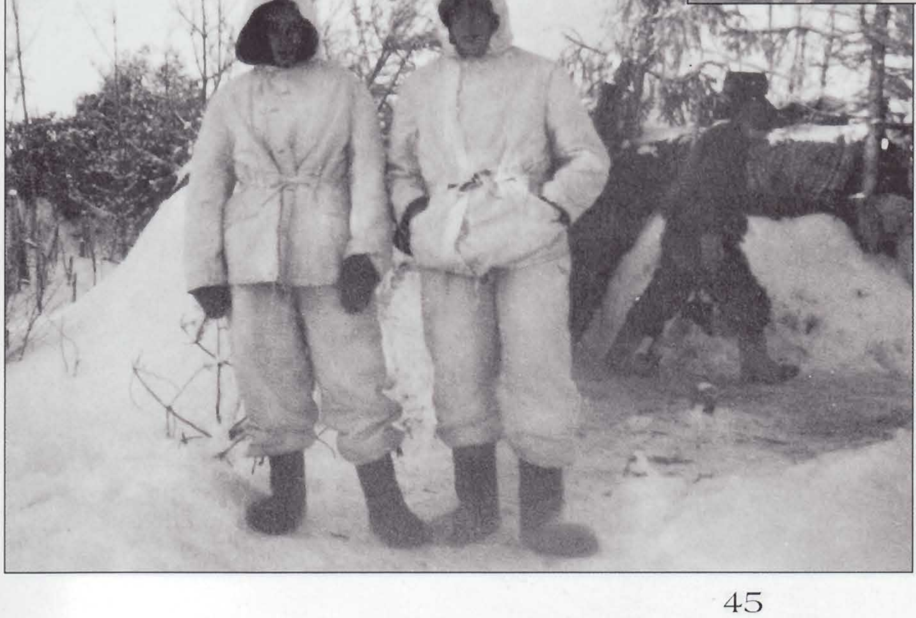
A "Wiking" Division patrol picks up two of many Red Army defectors. These prisoners were fortunate not to have been shot by their own troops, who would not hesitate to shoot men they saw moving toward German lines. Nevertheless, these two will probably regret their decision before long.



The reversible insulated winter suit proved to be very popular and was typically worn through the entire winter without it ever being removed. It was not long before it lost its pristine snow white. The tinted goggles prevented snow blindness caused by unrelenting sun glare off the snow. He is armed with the 9mm MP40 machine pistol, often incorrectly called a "Schmeisser."

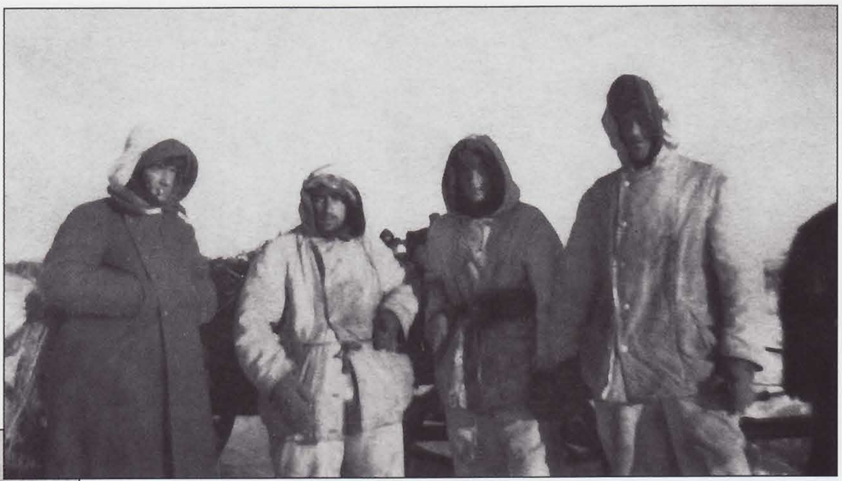


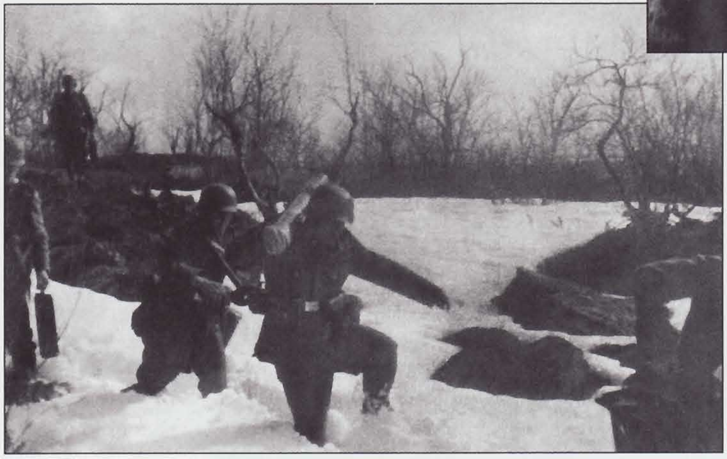
A ski patrol of the 6.SS-Gebirgs-Division "Nord" consults a map. They wear extremely loose fitting two-piece snow over-suits. Black and red button-on strips were provided for friend or foe recognition and could be worn in different combinations. Ski poles and the tops of snow skies were normally painted white while the bottoms and edges were natural wood to permit waxing.



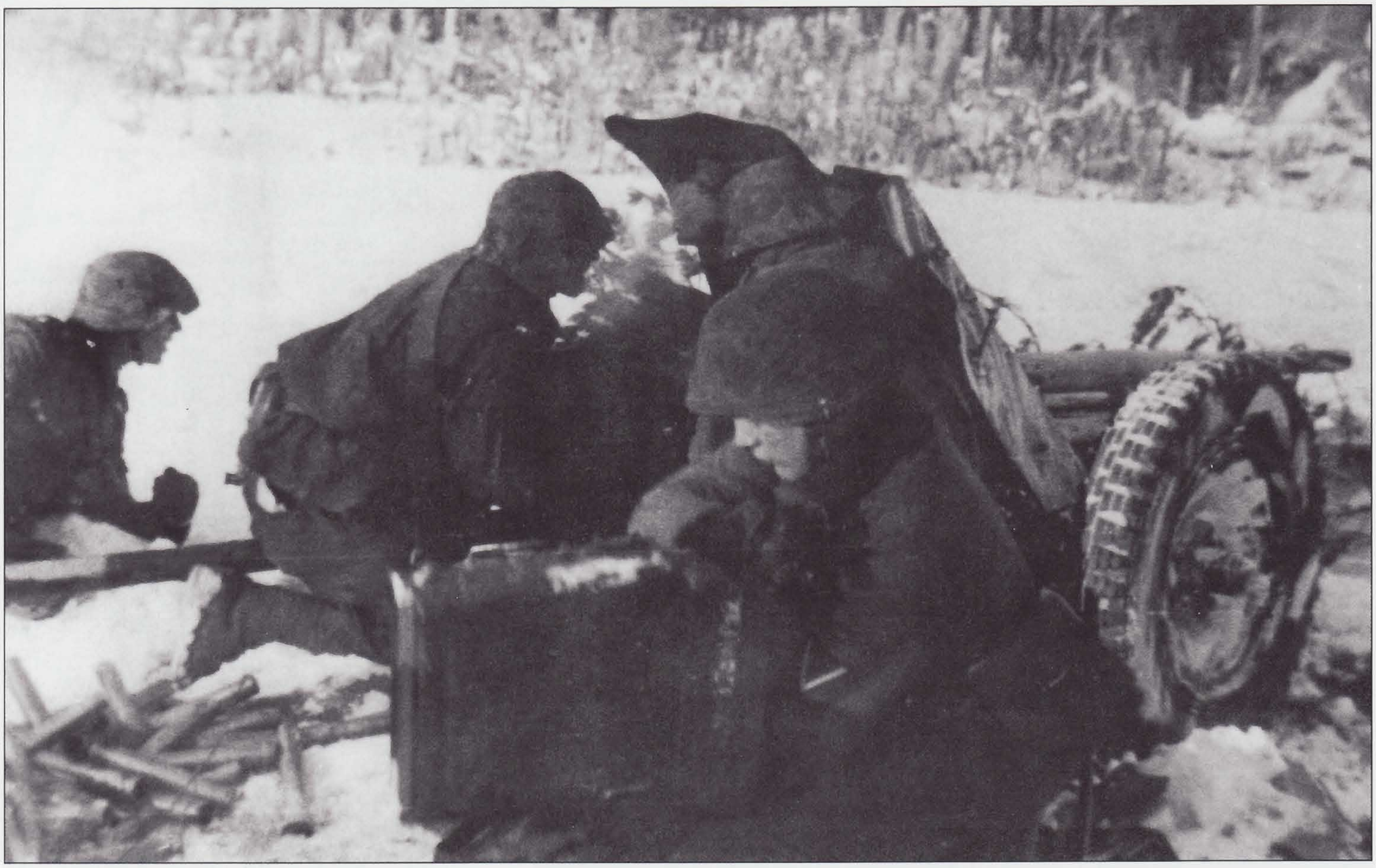
The Waffen-SS reversible insulated winter suit was of a different design than the Heeres model. It was, obviously, white on one side and a camouflage pattern on the other. It included a jacket, trouser, detachable hood, mittens, and suspenders. Retaining cords were provided for the mittens, which were worn over wool gloves. Insulated or felt boots were issued separately.

Besides the winter special clothing (Winter-Sonderbekleidung) issued only to frontline combat troops, efforts were made to improve regular clothing. Here a soldier wears two wool greatcoats, one being oversized, for added protection. This was standard issue to some units. It proved to be heavy and very cumbersome making it ill-suited for combat action. He wears a hood and at least two wool torques pulled over his head.

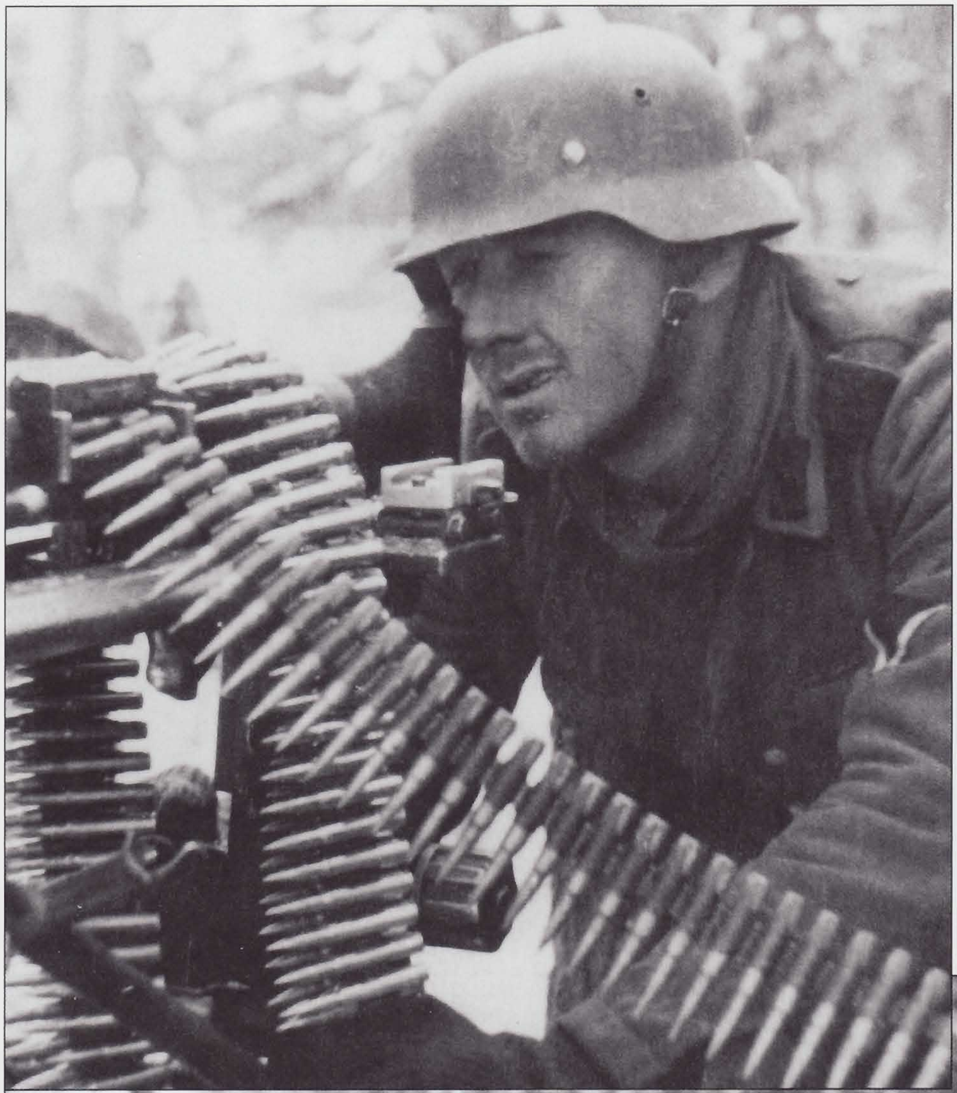




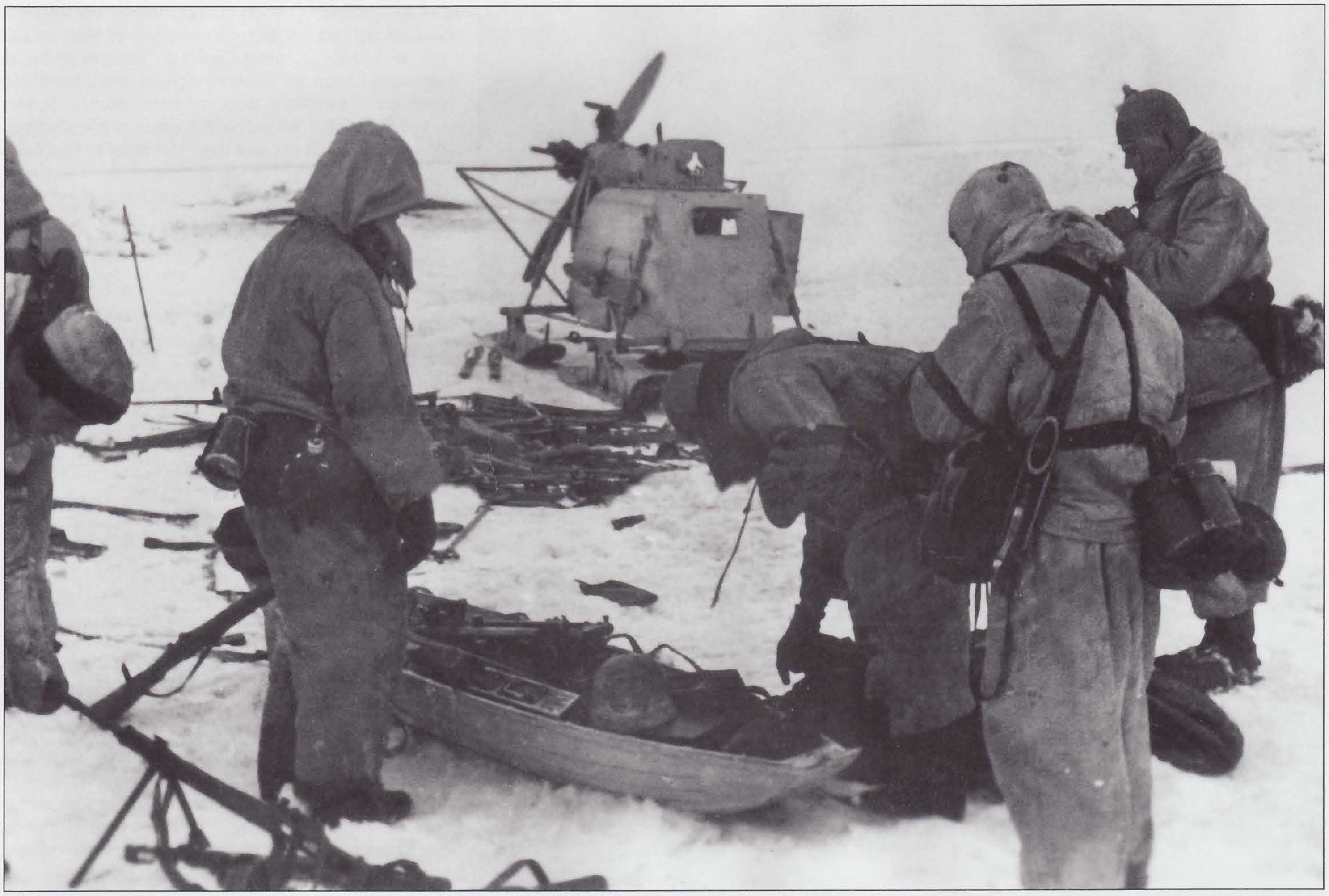
The crew of an 8cm m.Gr.W.34 medium mortar struggle with their considerable and awkward burdens through deep snow. Two of the ammunition numbers follow carrying the steel ammunition containers, each holding three rounds. The infantry battalion's machine gun company had a platoon of four 8cm (actually 81mm) mortars, the Granatwerferzug.



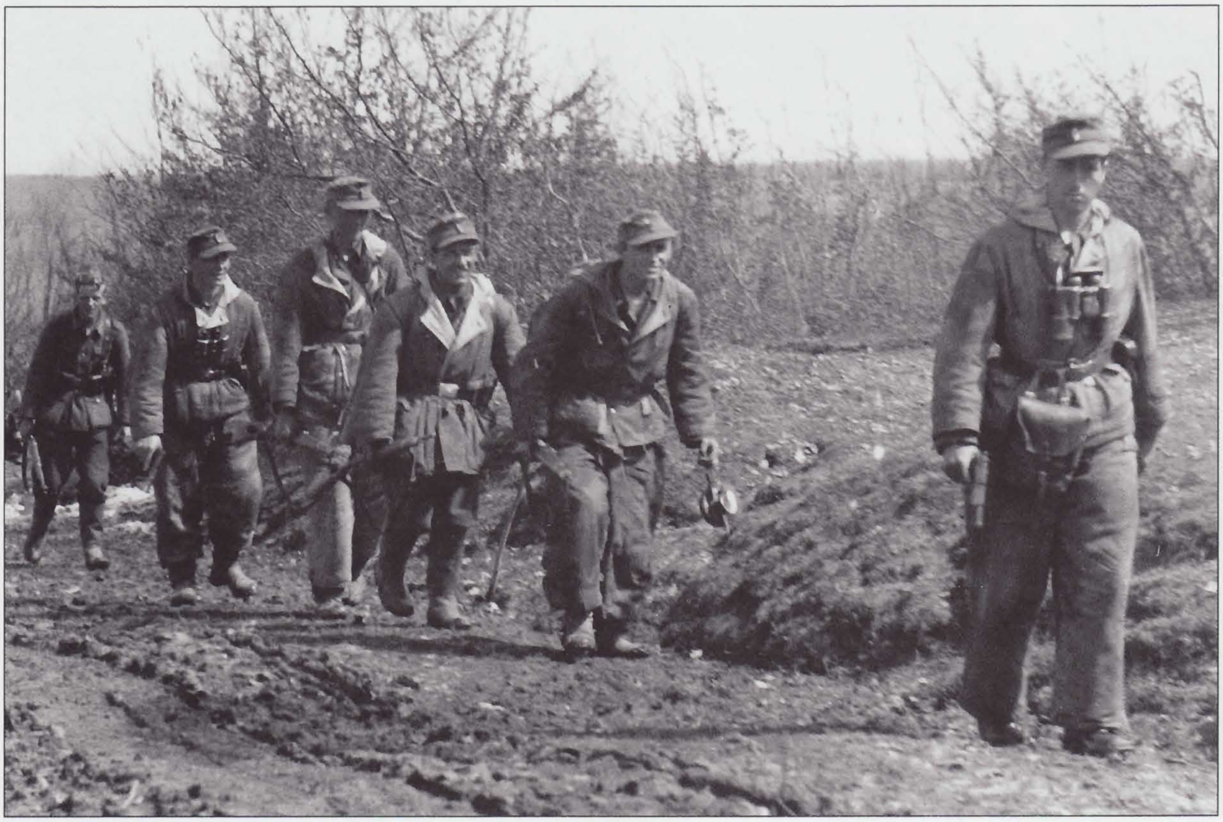
As demonstrated by the litter of spent cartridge cases this 3.7cm Pak 35/36 antitank gun crew has kept up a high rate of fire. When this many rounds were fired from one position it was probably providing direct fire support against field fortifications or defended buildings rather than tanks. Both armor-piercing and high-explosive ammunition was provided. When engaging tanks antitank guns frequently relocated in order to survive. The ammunition was carried in 12-round steel containers. The ammunition was not shipped and issued in these watertight containers, but shipped in larger capacity crates and the rounds were placed in the steel containers making them more easily carried by the crews in the field. The same applied to 5cm and 8cm mortar ammunition.



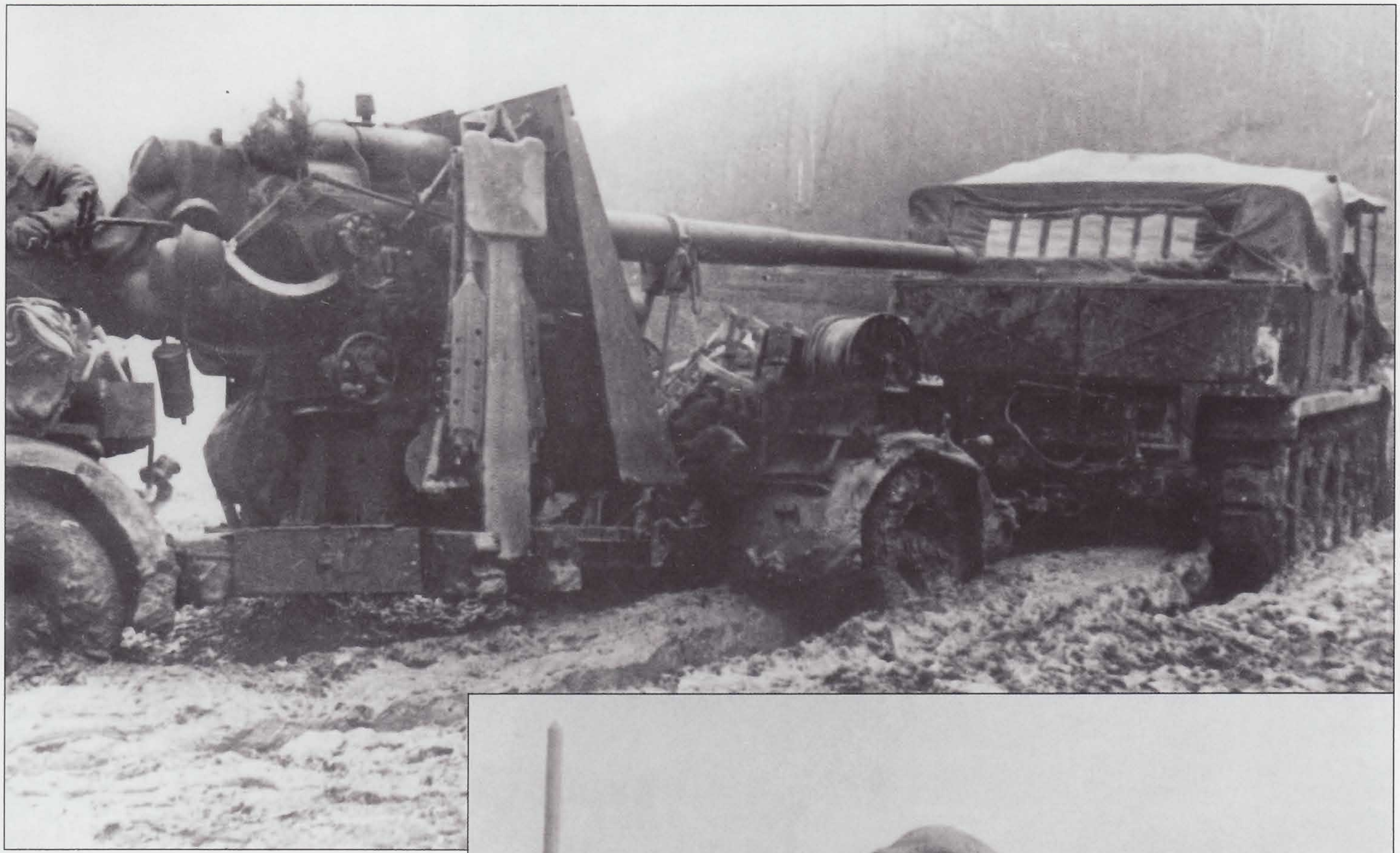
The gunner, an SS-Sturmmann, of an MG34 heavy machine gun sights down the barrel. The long-range optical sight has not been fitted as evident by the empty mounting bracket below his chin. Normally every fifth round was a tracer, but only one tracer round with a black tip can be seen, the sixth round from the feed way. The non-disintegrating metallic linked belt was part of the gun's equipment. They were not discarded after firing, but retained and reloaded from wooden crates holding 1,500 rounds. The crates held five 300-round cartons (the same number of rounds in a metallic linked belt) with each containing 20 15-round cardboard packets.



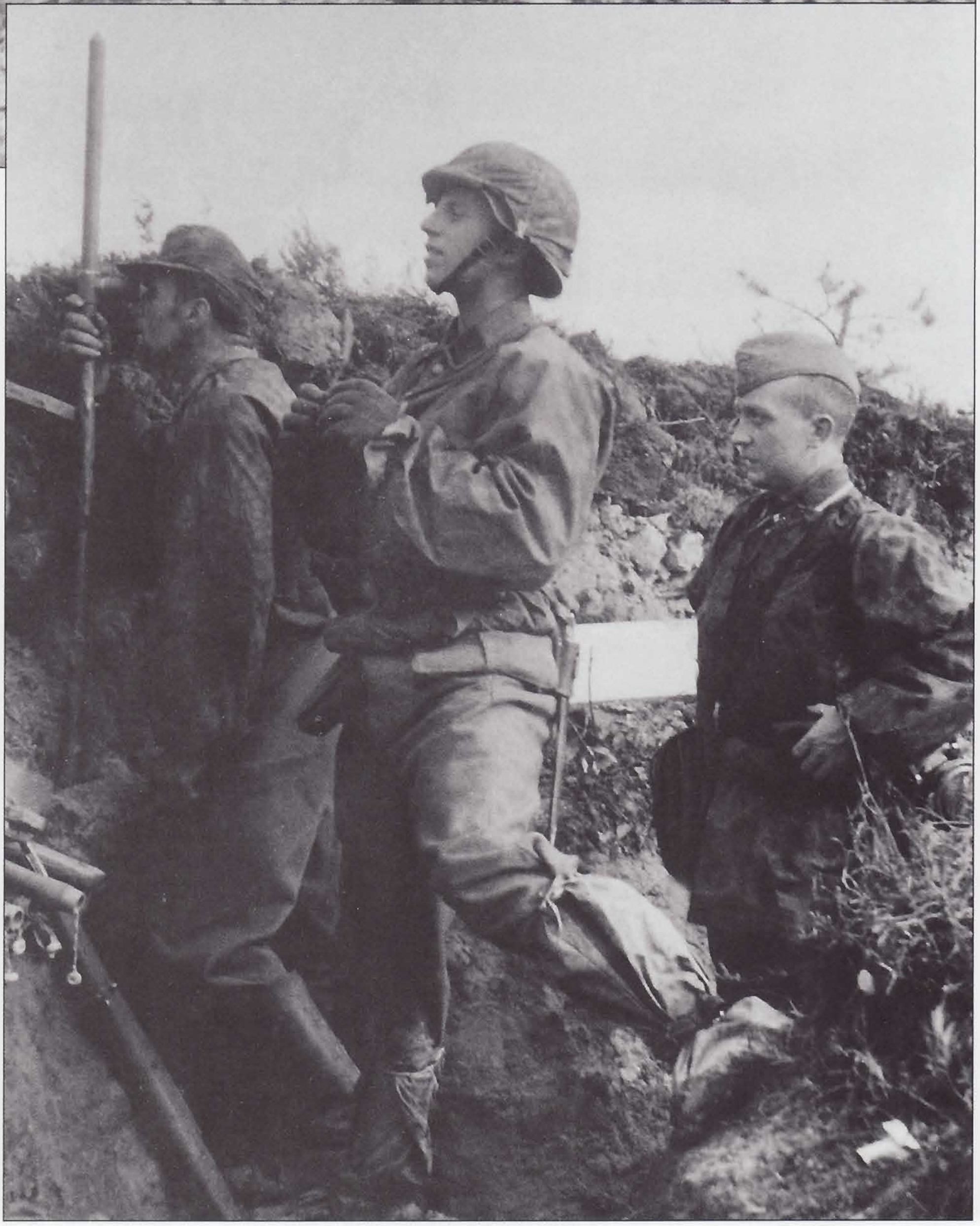
"Totenkopf" troops load ammunition and other useful items on a small Bootskaya, winter 1942/43. Littered about are discarded Soviet weapons. In the background is a Soviet NKL-26 aerosan (aerosled), a ski-vehicle powered by an aircraft engine and crewed by a driver and machine gunner. Captured aerosans saw some use by the Germans. An aerosan could tow four ski troops at low speed or transport four men at 25 to 35 kilometers per hour. They were used for reconnaissance and hit-and-run raids. While most effective in open areas such as the steppes, plains, and frozen lakes, they used frozen rivers as roads and could even travel along forest roads at slower speeds.



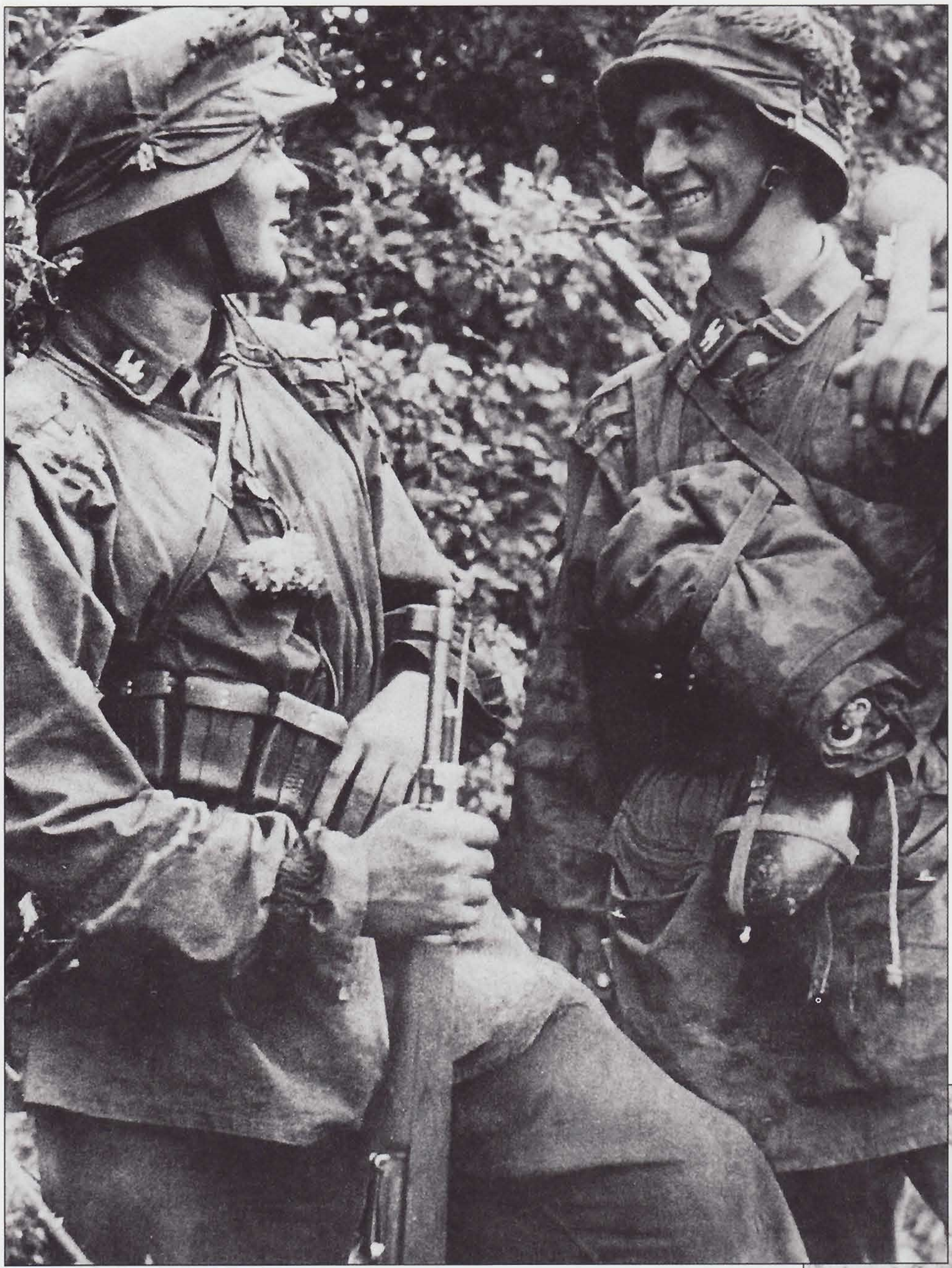
A patrol moves up a road. It appears winters is about over and the ceaseless spring rains have begun. The lead man has his P38 pistol drawn. It was unusually for a leader to conduct a patrol armed only with a pistol. Its realistic effective range was less than 20 meters.



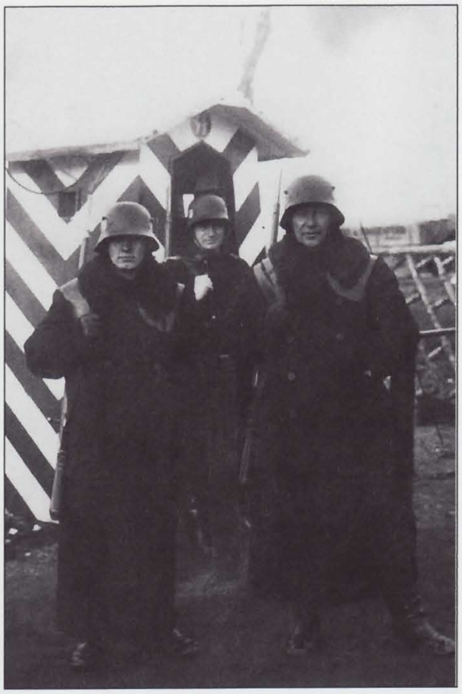
A "Wiking" Division 8.8cm Flak 18 is towed through the mud by a 12-ton Sd.Kfz.8 heavy halftrack (schwerer Zugkraftwagen). The Flak 18 was first fielded in 1934. The "18" is a series designation rather than the year designation of the Flak 36, 37, and 41. The rasputitza, the Russian word for "big mud," aptly described the results of the heavy autumn rains.



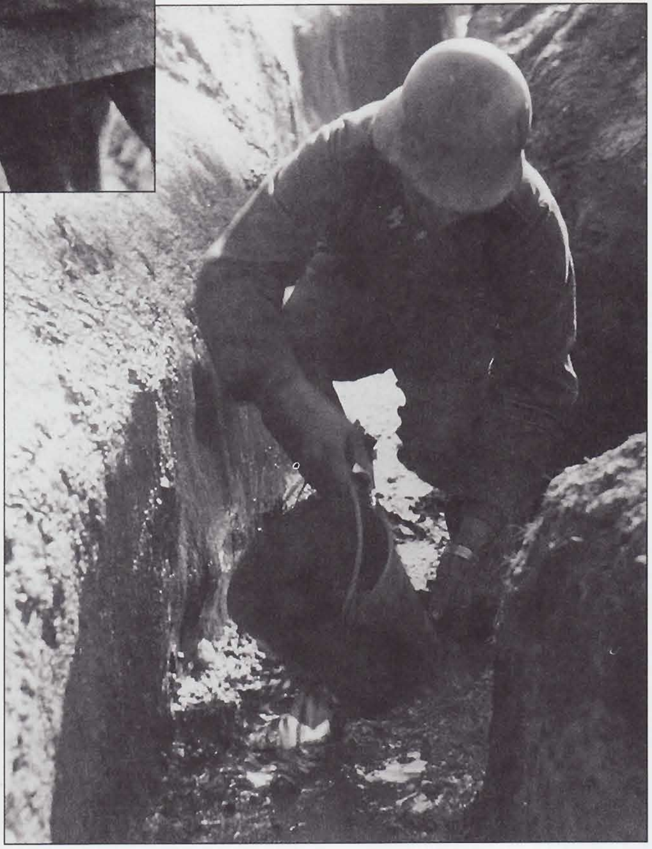
Observers peer over the edge of a trench with great caution. Snipers were a considerable problem. A Soviet 4x TR scout periscope is used by one observer. It had a cup in the bottom end into which a stick could be inserted to aid in holding it steady. The man taking a quick peak over the trench's parapet is wearing the rubber-coated fabric over-boots of the motorcycle protective suit; the boots are seldom seen in a clear view. At the left edge of the photograph can be seen the ends of handle of a stack of stick hand grenades. The end caps have been unscrewed and their detonating pull cords can be seen dangling in readiness; not a very safe practice.



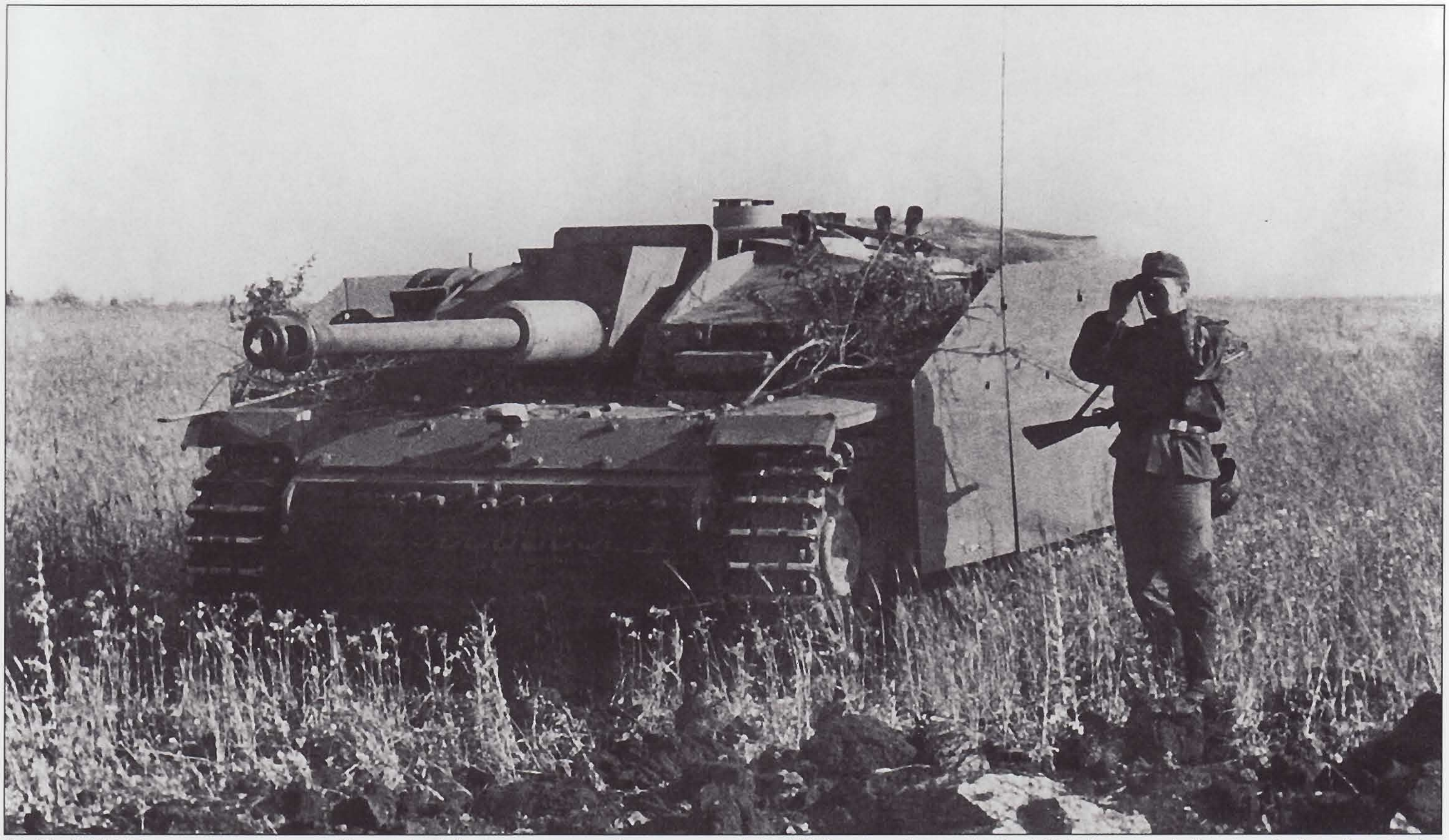
Two riflemen clad in camouflage smocks and helmet covers with camouflage face masks rolled up on the helmet brows. Their collars are exposed. They would be covered by the smock if snipers were a problem. The man to the right carries a Panzerfaust 30.



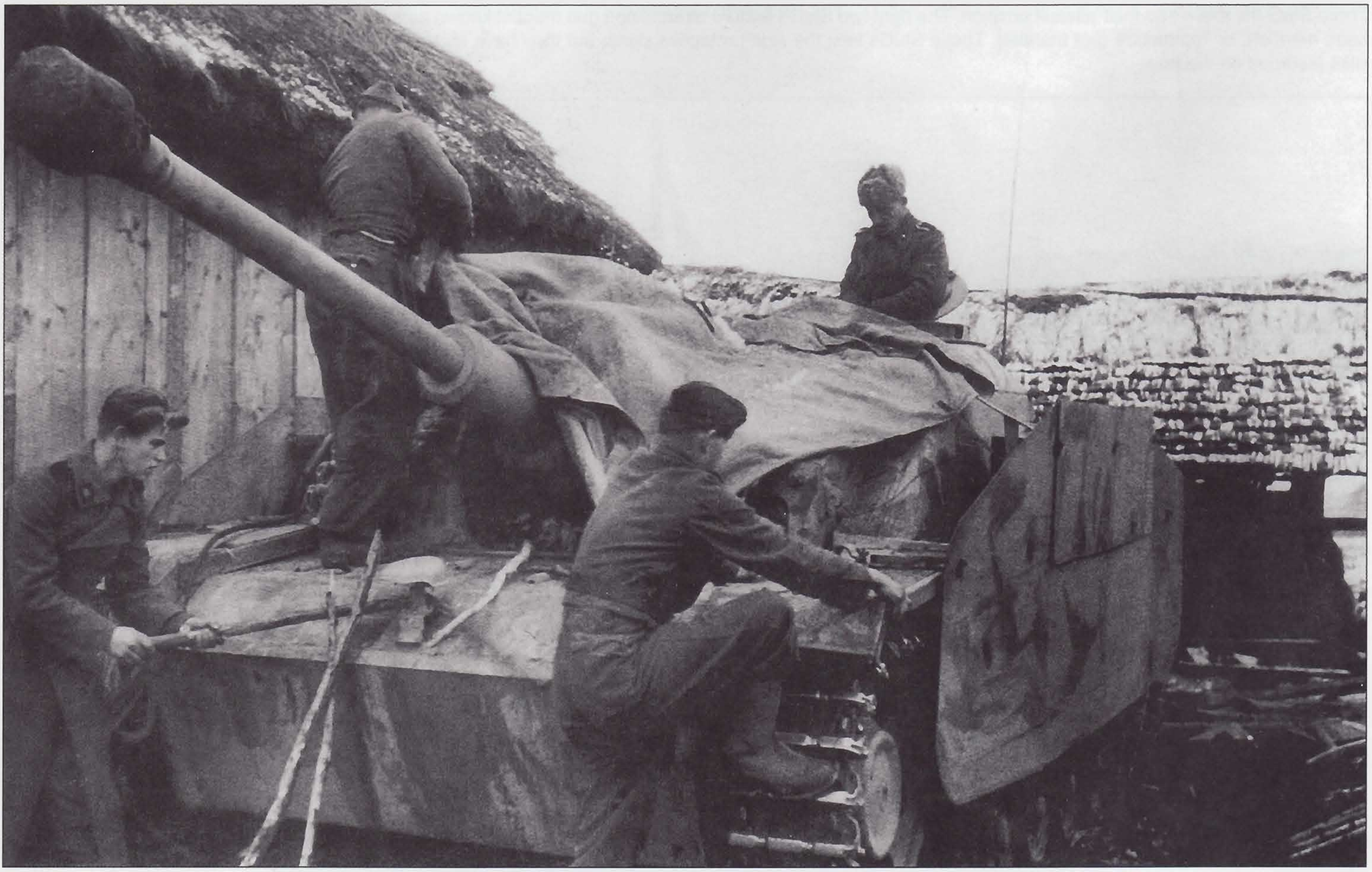
Three sentries stand before a black and white stripped guard hut. They wear special fur-lined overcoats (Übermantel); the large black fur collars are evident. There were many variations of this overcoat intended for wear by sentries. The coats have tan leather shoulder pads to protect the coat's wool cloth from wear by rifle slings. They also wear World War I M16 steel helmets.



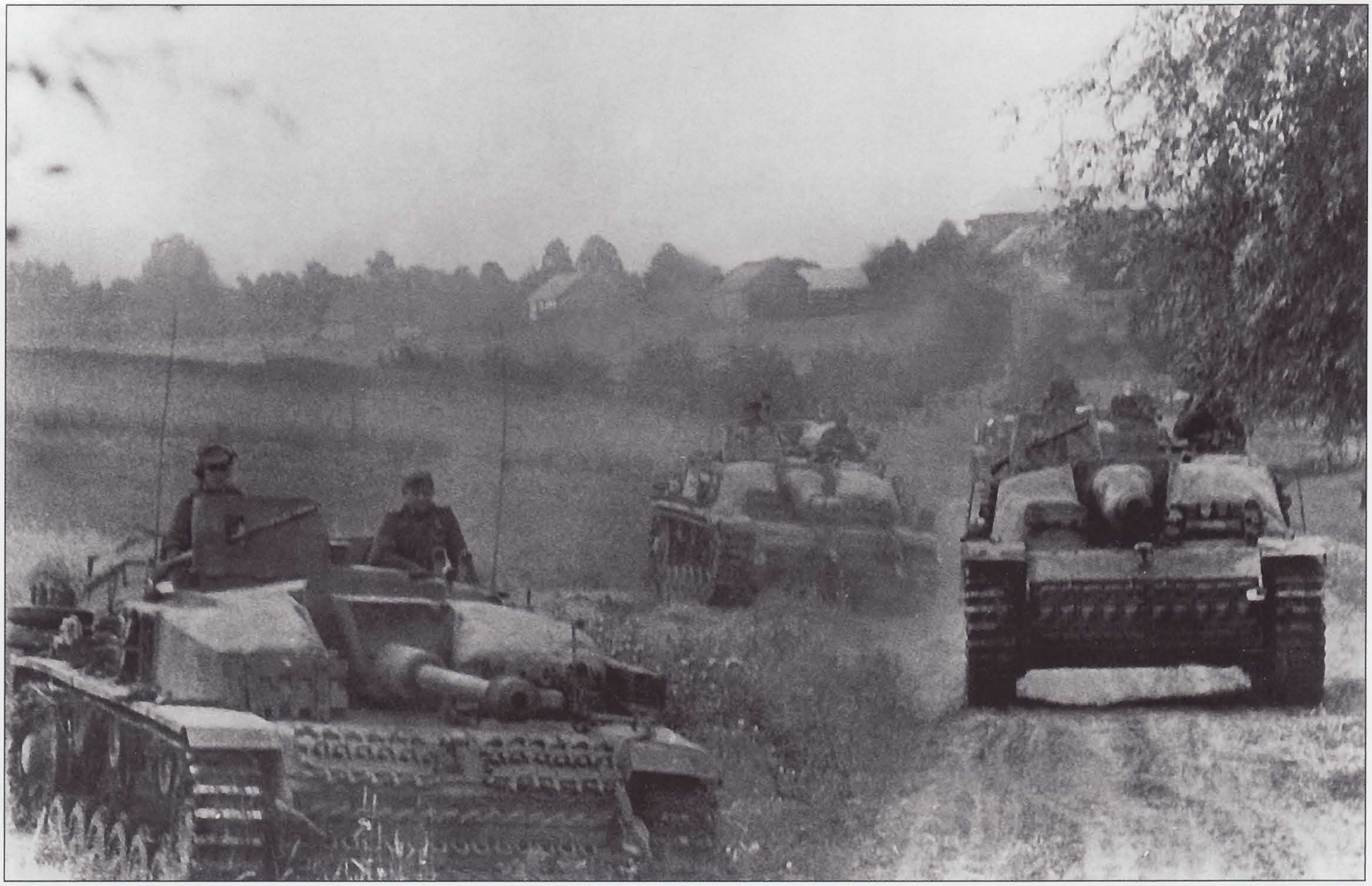
A member of the 27.Freiwilligen-Grenadier-Division "Langemarck" futilely attempts to bail mud out of a trench. He wears a cuff band inscribed with "Frw. Legion Flandern" (Volunteer Flemish Legion). Above this he wears a yellow shield with a black lion.



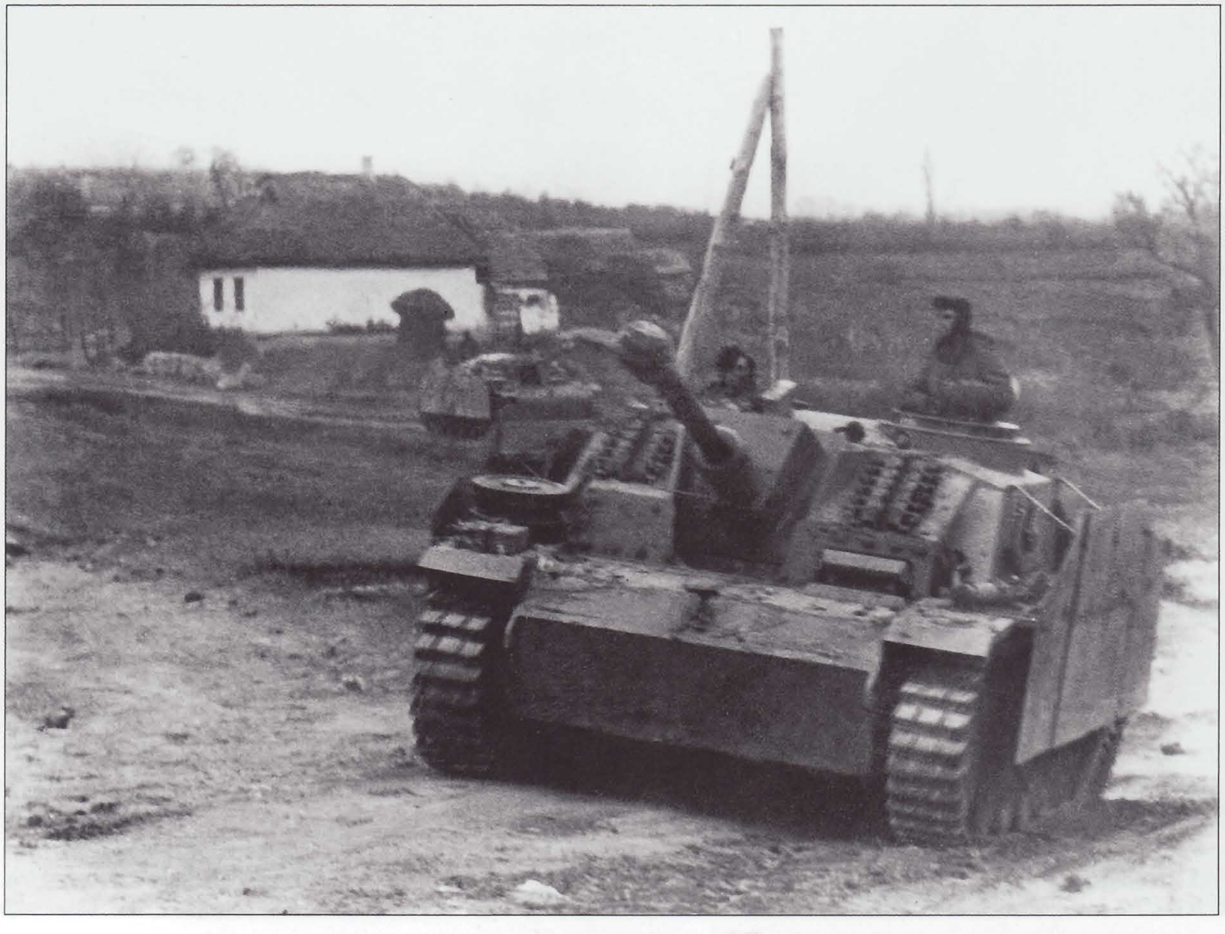
An StuG III 7.5cm gun-armed assault gun. An infantryman scans for enemy activity. While assault guns lacked 360-degree rotating turrets found on tanks, their low profile and heavy frontal armor was extremely beneficial. Note the commander's 6x30 Sf 14Z Scherenfernrohr (scissors binoculars); known as Eselsohren (donkey ears) to the troops.



This StuG crew readies their combat vehicle for action. This assault gun, as many, is fitted with 5mm thick protective side-skirts (Schürzen) to help protect it from shaped-charge projectiles such as the bazooka. This StuG has been whitewashed for winter camouflage, but much has been abraded off revealing the original camouflage colors.



Three StuG IIIs move into their assault position. The right two StuGs feature streamlined gun mantlet known as a Saukopf (sow's head), Saukopfblende (pig's head mantlet), or Topfblende (pot mantlet). These StuGs lack the side protective skirts, but they have shields for the MG34 machine guns plus spare track links fastened on the bow.



StuG III Sd.Kfz. 142/1 assault guns moves into position. The 7.5cm gun-armed Sturmgeschütz was simply called a "Stug" by soldiers. Assault gun units were part of the artillery and not the Panzertruppen. As such they were organized as artillery units into battalions (Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung) with three batteries (Batterie) of seven or ten guns each—one in the battery headquarters (Batterietrupp) and two or three in each of the three platoons (Geschütz-Zug).

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